

# GENIUS Matters

Imagine a classroom where passion-driven genius work is not extracurricular, but is a part of the routine. Students are invited and expected to collaborate to support each other's genius; to experiment with ideas, discover new possibilities and make epic things happen. **Genius Hour is more than a "program"** where students do fun projects together. Genius Hour is a nearly unprecedented opportunity for teachers to guide students in how to be effective learners and citizens, by helping them connect what they do in school to the broader community. It's our job to nurture our geniuses so they can change the world. Join us today to unlock a world of genuine curiosity and wonder.



**Angela Maiers** has been leading change in education and enterprise for 25 years, teaching kindergarten to graduate school and consulting with school districts and leaders. Her powerful message and down-to-earth style has made her a highly sought-after keynote speaker. Angela is the author of Classroom Habitudes and the Passion-Driven Classroom. Angela is the founder of Choose2Matter, a grass roots social movement and a community of engaged change-makers transforming the way we lead, learn and live.

Sponsored by  
**SMART**

# GENIUS Matters

## A FRAMEWORK FOR EPIC TRANSFORMATION

GENIUS Matters

Angela Maiers



ANGELA MAIERS

# GENIUS Matters

---

**A Framework For  
Epic Transformation**

Angela Maiers

Sponsored by

**SMART**<sup>®</sup>  
smarttech.com



# GENIUS Matters

---

**A Framework For  
Epic Transformation**

Angela Maiers

Angela Maiers is also the co-author with Amy Sandoval of *Passion Driven Classroom* and author of *Classroom Habitudes*.

Copyright © 2017 by Choose2Matter, Inc.

#### **Copyright Notice**

*This book is copyrighted material owned by the authors and Choose2Matter, Inc. It may not be distributed by any other party without written permission from Choose2Matter, Inc.*

*All third-party images and videos contained herein belong to their respective copyright owners.*

*Liberating Genius and Choose2Matter are trademarks of Choose2Matter, Inc.*

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.

First Printing: 2017

ISBN 978-1-365-02500-6

Choose2Matter, Inc.  
205 Sherman St.  
Lynbrook, NY 11563

Choose2Matter.org

Ordering Information:

Special discounts are available on purchases of 25 or more copies. For this or any other special order, contact the publisher at [YouMatter@Choose2Matter.org](mailto:YouMatter@Choose2Matter.org)

## **DEDICATION**

*To Genius Everywhere.  
We see you.  
We value you.  
You Matter to the world.*

# CONTENTS

## Acknowledgements

### Foreward

### Preface

### How to Use this Guide

### Leave No Genius Behind

### The First 20 Days at a Glance

## Days 1 through 7: Accepting Your Genius

Setting Up Your Genius Notebook.....	1
Introduction to Genius Hour .....	6
What Is Genius? .....	10
How Do Genius Learners Work? .....	19
What is My Genius?.....	24
Proud to Be Me .....	31
What Do I Want to Be? .....	35

## Days 8 through 13: Accelerating Your Genius

My Passion, My Heart.....	42
My Passion Profile .....	48
My Passion Practice.....	50
The World Needs Your Contribution -NOW.....	52
I Am; You Are .....	61
Self-Awareness .....	65
Listening Loudly.....	69
Seeing Clearly .....	71

## Days 14 through 20: Acting Through Collective Genius

Finding a Dream Team.....	74
What Matters to the People Around Me.....	78
Many Kinds of Courage .....	82
How to Collaborate Effectively .....	86
Finding Mentors and Collaborators.....	93
Sharing Our Genius with the World .....	97
Putting It All Together.....	100

## Implementation of Genius Matters

You'll Never Walk Alone: The #GeniusHour Community .....	104
Why Genius Matters, Helping You Make the Case.....	109
Communications with Parents .....	111
Launching and Sustaining Genius Hour .....	113
How Do I Grade Genius Hour .....	115
Student Sharing .....	117
SMART: Connecting Genius Through Technology .....	119
Additional Read.....	121
The Next Level: Choose2Matter.....	122
Closing Thoughts .....	124

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*I cannot believe my good fortune each and everyday. To begin everyday knowing that you are doing work that matters with people whom you love and respect is a true gift.*

*I take deep satisfaction in knowing that the most important words and lessons in this book have already found embodiment thanks to the gifted people I am privileged to call colleagues and friends.*

*To communities of teachers and leaders across the world who have created settings where genius not only survives; it thrives. They are so numerous, I cannot list them by name but I want to point toward them and shine a light on their unwavering belief in themselves and their students. You have my eternal gratitude, love and respect.*

*I want to extend a very special thank you to all the teachers who have opened their classroom to me, to all the students who have inspired these conversations to be deeper and more impactful and all the change makers I have been privileged to know and learn from.*

*I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to the entire SMART team. It is such an honor and pleasure to work with people who are not only brilliant and creative but always growing, searching and deepening their commitment to children and to this mission. It is an honor to be your partner.*

*My incredible and beloved team of comrades at Choose2Matter – you are a source of everyday joy and inspiration and unwavering support.*

*Courtney Collins Behrens- Thank you for sharing so much of your time and wisdom, and for adding so much beauty and magic to these lessons. Your contributions have given a depth and direction the work would have otherwise lacked. I relied on you to remember things I had forgotten, to test out ideas and to support me in moments of doubt. You always kept me laughing (mostly at myself). You have inspired me time and again to be braver, bolder - more than I ever thought I could be.*

*And to each of you, our readers, who I have tried to imagine not only reading this book, but using YOUR genius to make it come alive in ways I could not have imagined.*

*You are already making a difference; whether you know it or not, and the more you understand the difference you are making, the bigger difference it will be.*

*Angela* 

## FOREWARD

*"Genius is not a possession of the limited few but exists in some degree in everyone.*

*Where there is natural growth, a full and free play of faculties, genius will manifest itself."*

**~ Robert Henri, American Painter, The Art Spirit**

Hello and welcome to this course!

I have spent my whole career in the presence of genius; surrounded by teachers, leaders and students. Nothing excites me more than seeing someone fiercely own their genius after realizing the world needs their particular talent and perspective.

Genius is the source of our energy and the root of our resiliency. When faced with challenges, it is our genius that helps us overcome them. Yet we live and work in a world where most of us have been conditioned to underestimate, doubt, and even ignore our unique talents and passions.

The answers lie within us and in the heart and soul of every learner. Standards mean little if the people that adhere to them are dehumanized in the process.

That's why this course is different than others. It depends on you - your passion, your conviction, your contribution. Our students' genius is waiting to be unleashed, and we have to be the ones who liberate it.

Consider this your personal invitation to do so. May this online course launch the pursuit of a lifetime.

In this course, we provide a step-by-step guide to help you illuminate, cultivate, and celebrate the unique contributions you and your students have to share with the world.

- In the first set of lessons, we begin the brave journey of owning and living up to our genius.
- Set two focuses on how to discover and explore what makes us come alive, and how encourage others to do the same.
- The final set explores a powerful way of solving problems by leveraging collective genius.

Let's collectively vow to give students a front row seat to their own genius, believe in them more than anyone ever has, and challenge them to dare greatly.

This is my challenge to you. This is my challenge to us.

You are literally just a few weeks away from the classroom of your dreams - one full of courageous, passionate, inspired human beings.

By joining this discussion, you are honoring these truths.

- WE matter.
- We are all geniuses, and the world needs our contribution.
- YOU are the voice students need to whisper in their ears when the world tells them otherwise.
- YOU are the change.

The impact that you make on your students will define much of the impact you make on this world.

Together we will find our will and our voice. Together we can and will make the world a better place.

We can't wait to begin!

## PREFACE - WHY THIS BOOK?

Five years ago, I published *The Passion Driven Classroom* and dreamed out loud for school to be a place that honors student passion and genius.

### Wondering boldly:

- *What would happen if students were given sufficient opportunity, encouragement and guidance to discover and explore their passions?*
- *What if all students understood that they have particular aptitudes, perspectives, and passions, and that what makes them "different" is their greatest gift?*
- *What would this mean for their confidence and boldness? For student engagement? For their perceptions about learning and school?*
- *More importantly, what would it mean for the world?*

I imagined a classroom where passion driven genius work was not extracurricular, but was a part of the routine. Students would be invited and expected to collaborate to support each other's genius; to experiment with ideas, discover new possibilities, and make epic things happen.

A few years and a few thousand classrooms later, this dream is becoming a reality. We have conclusive evidence that when we create a time and space for our students to strive audaciously and connect and collaborate with others, their genius is liberated, and learning, lives and worlds change.

Still, we are in the early days of figuring out the best way to turn our classrooms into places of inquiry and experimentation in which push-ing limits, discovery and creation are daily activities.

Let's do this together, step-by-step, one lesson at a time and watch our brave grow! I can't wait to take this journey with you!

You Matter,

Angela Maiers

## Reflection

Consider the questions that Angela asked “out loud” in her book five years ago. Based on what you know so far:

- What do you think will happen if your students are given sufficient opportunity, encouragement and guidance to discover and explore their passions?
- What if all your students came to understand that they have particular aptitudes, perspectives, and passions, and that what makes them “different” is their greatest gift?
- What would this mean for their confidence and boldness? For student engagement? For their perceptions about learning and school?
- More importantly, what would it mean for the world?



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



A rose by any other name....

There are many names used for when teachers allocate a certain amount of time each week to allow students to find and explore their passion.

Genius Time, 20% Time, and Passion Projects are just a few of them. Because Genius Hour is the most commonly used, and for the sake of consistency, this is the term we will use throughout this book.

How much time must we allocate to Genius Hour?

You will allocate whatever time your classroom schedule permits. It may be a day a week, an hour a day, an hour a week, or it may vary from week to week. We do encourage you to create a steady schedule for the first 20 days, but after many students will work independently, and hopefully, often on their own time!

At the end of each chapter, there are discussion questions for educators; they can be used to contextualize your thinking while engaging either with a group or independently. Those of you who are new to Genius Hour or passion-based learning may want to immerse yourselves in each step. Those of you with some experience with Genius Hour may focus your attention on select chapters.

My aim was to make this a one-stop resource for Genius Hour. My lessons only extend 20 days, and seek to set the conditions for a successful launch of Genius Hour. They do not delve deeply into the “output” of Genius Hour - student projects that demonstrate their learning and growing. That I leave to the robust, prolific and generous community of Genius Hour educators who have much to offer you. Thus I’ve included many helpful resources from other Genius Hour leaders, and suggest some additional reading at the end of the guide.

Genius Hour is not merely a “program” during which students do fun projects. Rather, Genius Hour is a nearly unprecedented opportunity for teachers to guide students in *how* to be effective learners and citizens, by helping them connect what they do in school to the broader community.

By its nature, Genius Hour is flexible, reactive, ever changing, and quite messy. Writing this book and compiling the outside resources was a challenge. I wanted to include enough structure to set you firmly down the path, but every teacher and student will require something a little different from *his or her* Genius Hour.

Be courageous. Be relentless. Be passionate.

The world will demand the same of your students.

## LEAVE NO GENIUS BEHIND

*"The world is always ready to receive talent with open arms. Very often it does not know what to do with genius."*

~ **Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.** Physician and Poet

Stand up if you’re a genius.

Are you standing? Would your students be?

It’s an interesting experiment to try. Stand in a room of adults, or even teenagers, and ask each genius in the room to rise and be noticed.

I’ll caution you ahead of time; you will likely find that you are the only one standing.

Now try the same thing with a group of five-year olds. This time, my warning is more emphatic: move out of the way or be trampled as they charge forward with speed and audacity that will take your breath away. It is amazing to witness.

Why is this? When do we give up ownership of our gifts? Become modest about our talent? Hide our uniqueness? Deny our genius?



*"Before we're 17, we're told 'we can't' 150,000 times, and 'we can' 5,000 times.*

*This is why we limit our lives, our beliefs about ourselves, our goals and our human race.*

*"We weren't born to have the fear and limitations we carry with us.*

*We were born to believe in our potential."*

**~ Rebel Brown**

What Would You Do If You  
Knew You Were Limitless?

So many people urge me to "stop telling kids they are geniuses—you're setting up unrealistic expectations." Unrealistic for whom?

We need to change that belief. Right here, right now.

We can tell you scores of stories of young people who have discovered and learned to own their genius, and who are doing remarkable, innovative things that are changing the world. Sadly, in almost all instances, it occurred outside of school. Why is school not a place for invention, innovation and world changing? Why is school not an apprenticeship to citizenship?

Why are the stories of our greatest minds always stories of rebels, renegades, and outlaws who scorned formal education? Why do so many famous quotes urge us not to let school "get in the way of our education" or kill our curiosity, creativity and passion?

Do we believe this to be true of our classroom, our school? If so, how are we going to make our school a place that nurtures curiosity, creativity, innovation, bravery and nobility?

There is something mightier than all the grades, scores, awards and certificates, and titles that will ever be.

You.

Standing shoulder to shoulder with others who help you get to the person you were meant to be – the one who changes the world.

Let's change the conversation and put genius on the agenda. It begins with a new definition that embraces what geniuses do, rather than who and what they are. Let's look beyond IQ, genetic anomalies, and worldwide acclaim and consider the work of genius.

What does a genius do?

I love the list in Seth Godin's book, *Linchpin*:

1. A genius solves a problem in a way no one else could.
2. A genius looks at a problem with fresh eyes.
3. A genius changes the rules.
4. A genius is someone who's willing to do the work of a human being.
5. A genius is ready to make a unique impact on the world; solve a problem in a new way.
6. A genius gives the world something it didn't know was missing.

Know anyone like this? You do if you teach kindergarten.

We are in the presence of genius every day. We bear witness to five-year-olds who know how to finger-paint without stress. Second graders who know how to make you laugh on the dimmest of days. Middle school students brave enough to share their story in front of other people. Children who, if invited and indeed challenged to do so, would give our world something it badly needs.

Today's world demands minds that generate new perspectives, seek solutions, and discover emerging opportunities. These minds are sitting in your classroom today. They may be students who, at first glance, do not let their genius shine through. We urge you to take a deeper look at them.

Educating our children is about leading this genius into the world. Noticing, delighting in, and liberating this genius are at the heart of our work as parents and teachers. Let us change the world, as it was meant to be changed. Let's make our students citizen ready. Let's do it in school.

The ability of our students to lead their best lives depends on our willingness and ability to:

- Notice and honor their genius
- Value and respect their contribution
- Tell them they matter, and are essential to us and the world

When we do all three, we show them we believe in their genius. What follows will take your breath away.

It starts with this sentence:

**YOU ARE A GENIUS** .....  
**AND THE WORLD NEEDS YOUR CONTRIBUTION**  
ANGELA MAIERS

Imagine if your day started with these words when you walked into school, a staff meeting, or your office.

- How would you feel?
- How would you perform?
- How would that impact others around you?

For students in the classrooms I discuss below, this sign is not just a motivational tool; it is a call to action. Owning their genius is a responsibility they take very seriously, and it shows.



## Mrs. Sigler's First Grade Class

At first, Mrs. Sigler's 1st graders thought genius was probably a smart, cute, kind scientist, but they were not exactly sure. They decided to check out how the rest of the world defined 'genius'. They found words like curious, playful, imaginative, innovative, passionate, persistent, joyful and inventive.

All things they aspired to and were willing to become better at. She then asked her kids to tell their fellow classmates and the world why they were geniuses.

Here is what they proclaim that they are willing and ready to contribute:



*"I am a genius because I am an artist. I am cute. The world needs me to love them."*

~ Brooke



*"I am a genius because I recycle. The world needs me to help keep the world clean."*

~ Ben



*"I am a genius because I help people with cancer. The world needs me to help save peoples' lives."*

~ Ella

## Mrs. Jones' Fourth Grade Class

Students in Mrs. Jones, 4th grade class, created the following checklist of Genius Habitudes to work towards and set goals around.

- **Courage.** It takes courage to do things others consider impossible. Stop worrying about what people will think if you're different.
- **Self-Awareness.** Geniuses know what they want and go after it. Get control of your life and schedule. Have something specific to accomplish each day
- **Adaptability.** Being flexible enables you to adapt to changing circumstances readily. Resist doing things the same old way. Be willing to consider new options.
- **Curiosity.** An inquisitive, curious mind will help you seek out new information. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know it all. Always ask questions about things you don't understand.
- **Imagination.** Geniuses know how to think in new combinations, see things from a different perspective, than anyone else. Unclutter your mental environment to develop this type of imagination. Give yourself time each day to daydream, to fantasize, to drift into a dreamy inner life the way you did as a child.
- **Passion and Drive.** Geniuses have a strong desire to work hard and long. They're willing to give all they've got to a project.

Develop your drive by focusing on your future success, and keep going. They not only own their own genius; they are aware of and value the genius of those around them.

## Mrs. Voyle's Seventh Grade Class

I love how the 7th graders in Mrs. Voyle's class describe how genius fuels their learning and work:

"Our **genius** calls us to take on **challenges**. Facing those challenges, we acquire the **disciplines** to pursue our work in the world. In doing so we build our **character** and become the **authorities** we are meant to become. It feels like love."

Mrs. Voyle shared her reflection and impact on the study of genius on her blog:

*"I have known that the language that I use with my students is so very important and today using these labels really worked for me. I have a student who has really struggled in all aspects of school including with me. After having a really rough day together, I decided I needed to try something different. We discussed the learning that I had done the week before. I told this student that I learned that ALL students are genius. After a little more discussion the student grabbed a post it note and made this sign:*



*Not only did he just make the sign, but also he showed me his genius the whole period! He worked so hard and I was so proud of him. At the end of the day he took off his sign and said, "I'll leave this here so I can save my genius for tomorrow."*

*All from a difference in language!"*

On my blog, I regularly highlight and honor genius; students, teachers, and classrooms that are:

- Solving problems in a ways no one else could.
- Looking at the world with fresh eyes.
- Changing the rules.
- Making a unique impact on the world
- Working on becoming more compassionate, empathetic, and passionate.
- Giving the world something it didn't know was missing.

These geniuses are not only passing the test; they are changing the world.

Their stories are an important reminder and a point to take notice of in all our planning and work. As we eagerly seek to find methods, strategies, and ideas to best prepare our students for the world and work ahead; we must not forget to celebrate, cherish, and honor who they are right now, today.

Bring a video camera to class with you tomorrow. Have your digital camera on hand to capture their moments of genius - **Always Be Capturing** - and continue to notice what they already do with grace and ease.

Children so often teach me far more than anything I could offer them. So, tomorrow, consider this in your lesson plan:

*Boys and Girls,*

*When I watch you work, I am amazed at the genius I see. Let me give you a couple of examples... Today, I am here to let you know I have no doubt that you are capable of handling the challenging work ahead. Problems like this can only be solved by the Habitudes that you possess.*

*Today I need every one of them. I need your curiosity. I need your imagination. I need your willingness to persevere with me when things get tough. I need your courage, and most of all I need your passion.*

*We can so do this. Will you join me?*

What do you think? Will genius show up? I predict that whatever skill, strategy, or standard we will work on together is no match for the geniuses that lay in wait for your acknowledgement.

The world is ready to receive their talent with arms open wide. Let's do the same.

### Reflection

- Has your school or classroom traditionally offered an environment in which genius is invited and encouraged to thrive?  
If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you feel it's important to create or further such an environment?
- Are you ready to embrace your role in this process - not only liberating the genius of those you lead and teach, but also your own genius?

## THE FIRST 20 DAYS AT A GLANCE



### What are your hopes and dreams for this school year?

Many teachers ask students this question at the start of every school year. It's a conversation starter, and it sets the stage for awesome learning to follow.

While the question may seem simple, posing it to students and asking them to share their responses can have a profound effect on the classroom and community.

Just think about the messages inherent in the question: what you care about matters at school; your hopes and goals are taken seriously; you have a say in what and how we will learn.

Taking the time to help children articulate their hopes and dreams sets a tone of collaboration and mutual respect. It fosters reflection and self-knowledge by prompting children to ask themselves questions such as:

- What do I want learning to be like?
- What do I want from the experience of school?
- What matters to me most?
- What am I worried about?
- What am I most excited to learn more about and learn from?
- What am I going to become more awesome at?

Sharing hopes and dreams also creates a meaningful context for establishing classroom protocols and procedures. Once hopes have been articulated, discussions can begin about what "rules" will be needed to help everyone's hopes and dreams come true. This is the foundation and the rationale behind Genius Hour and/or Genius Time.

Genius Hour is the promise we make to one another, that our passions will matter; that we will do work that matters, and we will make time during the school day for it.

The lessons that follow are dedicated to helping students develop into better readers, writers, thinkers and most importantly passion-driven learners. To do this well in day-to-day life, students must develop patterns of thinking in which their ability is combined with their inclination to think well and their awareness of thinking opportunities. Students must have not only the opportunity to see passion-driven learning, but also to develop their own passions.

In seeking to liberate genius fully, we understand best within a class-room context in which:

1. Thinking is **valued**
2. There is time for thinking about our own and others passions
3. Rich **opportunities** for exploring passion
4. Passion-driven learning is regularly **modeled**
5. The process as well as the products of thinking are present in the **environment**

Such an environment sends the message that thinking is valued. In addition, it not only provides a time and place for the practice of students' skills but also provides the leverage needed to foster an inclination toward thinking and to develop a greater awareness of thinking occasions. Immersed in a classroom culture of thinking, students have the opportunity to develop patterns of behavior and thinking that become our habits.

The resources in this section are designed to help teachers collectively focus on the implicit messages about thinking being sent in classrooms and across the school.

Every successful Genius Hour will need some structure. Each day, students are told where to go and when and what to do. We need to teach them to use their independence toward a goal they create themselves, and this will take some structure. For students who initially don't cope well with a "blank sheet of paper," share a cartoon with them.

(<http://www.gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes/1995/12/31>)

As students become acclimated to this new working environment, the classroom may start to feel a bit “messy.” But a bit of mess can be good when students are actively exploring their passion. They should be talking to their classmates about their projects, and they should be moving around the room to find the resources they need.

### Passion-based Learning vs. Project-Based Learning

Genius Hour and project-based learning (PBL) were born out of a similar goal: for students to solve real-world problems in a classroom context. However, most implementations of PBL lack the single most important ingredient: passion. If students do not become giddy when they talk about their genius hour, it’s just another requirement to be satisfied, wrapped up with the veneer of being innovative. This is not student-centered, and it is not the transformative learning students need for the 21st century.

Passion-based learning starts with the most essential elements of a student’s humanity. It recognizes that learning is built strongly on experiences. From that foundation, a student’s efforts become “real-world” to the extent that they can change the world.

Further reading/viewing:

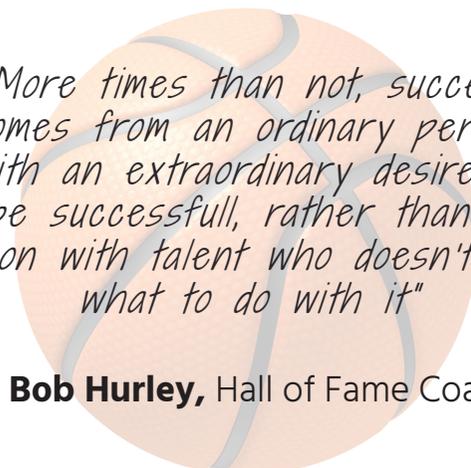
- Passion Driven vs. Project-Drive: There is a Difference (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5BFu0S4UVA>)
- Let’s Close the Passion Gap (<http://www.angelamaiers.com/2015/02/lets-close-the-passion-gap>)
- “Personal Statement” by Catherine Broyles (<https://vimeo.com/86149245>)

### Why Passion Matters

There is a passion gap in education, and students are falling through it and drowning in ennui. Why does passion matter? What is the downside of an education system that does not encourage and nurture passion?

Bob Hurley, Sr., the boy’s basketball coach at St. Anthony’s High School in Jersey City, NJ, is one of the most successful coaches in American history. In his memoir, *Chasing Perfect*, Hurley discussed the most important quality he looks for in a new basketball player. You might have guessed his answer would be height, or speed, or ball-handling ability, or court sense.

His answer? Passion. Hurley explains:



*“More times than not, success comes from an ordinary person with an extraordinary desire to be successful, rather than a person with talent who doesn’t know what to do with it”*

~ **Bob Hurley**, Hall of Fame Coach

Many others, in other professions, see passion as one of the most desirable traits in employees in the 21st century. New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman declares:

*“We need everyone to be innovating new products and services to employ the people who are being liberated from routine work by automation and software. The winners won’t just be those with more I.Q. It will also be those with more P.Q. (passion quotient) and C.Q. (curiosity quotient) to leverage all the new digital tools to not just find a job, but to invent one or reinvent one, and to not just learn but to relearn for a lifetime.”*

Many people mistake passion for an emotion, something people like to do in their spare time. Those are hobbies. Passion is what you must do, even if you have to suffer to do it. Passion is the genius of all geniuses. It’s discipline at a level we can’t comprehend.

So if passion is so essential in the work world, how do we cultivate it – in our children, our students, and our employees? First of all, we must let them know that we expect they will accomplish great things.

Next, we support them, every step of the way. To release a passion, a person may need above all else a role model. It may be a parent, a coach, a teacher, or a mentor.

Fred Wilson, a visionary venture capitalist, explains:

*"Finding your passion is critical to having a full and fulfilling life. You have to put yourself in a place to do that. For me, it started with a woman ... who pushed me to 'figure it out' and it ended with a couple of guys who passed their passion on to me. I am sure there are many other ways to get there. But it won't happen without help. So surround yourself with people who care about you and listen to them. And good things will come from that."*

This is an invitation, and an expectation, with only one rule:  
**Be Brave.**

### Reflection

- Why is it essential that our students develop passion to succeed in the 21st century?
- What is the difference between passion and a hobby?
- What conditions are necessary for passion to flourish in school?



**DAYS 1 THROUGH 7:**

Accepting Your Genius

## SETTING UP YOUR GENIUS NOTEBOOK

### Objective:

Students will learn how to record, keep and revisit their observations made during genius hour over the course of the school year.

### Background:

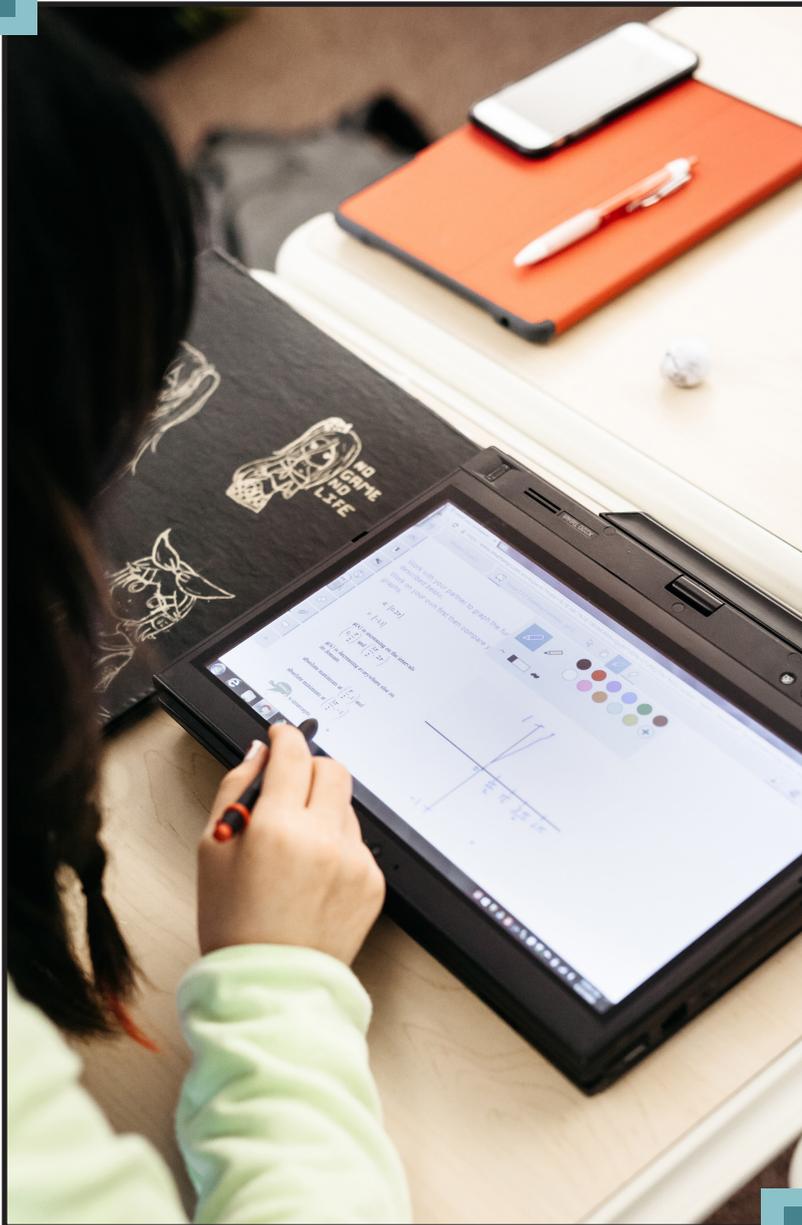
When students reflect on their work, it helps them learn how to think and learn how to learn. It helps them make connections back to previous work or experiences they've had, whether in school or out. They can then process all of this information, synthesize it, and develop their own insight into it and meaning from it. Meaningful reflection takes sufficient time and conscious effort, both before beginning a lesson and afterwards.

Ponder this equation: **Information + Action = Knowledge**

Knowledge is the result of information and action. Yet, knowledge of actions taken is still not wisdom. It is in the reflective process that we are able to see if the knowledge used and actions taken have produced something of value and worth.

Thus: **Knowledge + Experience + Reflection = Wisdom**

Wisdom born of reflection allows us to grow, develop, change, inspire, produce, attract, influence, contribute and teach. If we can teach ourselves to make reflection an integral part of living and learning, we have done something that makes knowledge deep and lasting.



If technology is prevalent in your school, then most likely you will choose a digital option for students to record most of their reflections in their Genius Notebooks. Because your choices may be driven by the technology decisions your school or district has made, and because new tools seem to come along every day, we don't recommend a particular technology. If you need advice, ask other educators on social media or search on outstanding education websites such as Edutopia.

We also highly recommend that students keep a separate folder or notebook to house printed photos, drawings, handwritten notes, scribbles, etc. Even "digital natives" benefit from the spontaneity, and often-deeper reflection, that physical media affords.

Other schools may rely solely on a paper notebook. If so, we recommend:

- Have students bring a large bound notebook or heavy-duty three-pronged folder to class.
- Save five to ten pages at the front of the notebook to house information about it and a cumulative table of contents.
- Have them number the pages immediately so they start in an organized fashion.

Find a central location in the classroom to store the notebooks, or instruct students to bring their Genius Notebooks to class each time a lesson is taught. Encourage the students to get in the habit of reflection and reflective writing each time you meet.

### Notebook Contents:

The notebook should be the student's personalized record of Genius Hour learning. The contents can include a range of materials that are relevant to the individual. The notebook should hold everything when possible.

The contents can include a range of materials that are relevant to the individual. The notebook should hold everything when possible.

I have built notebook use and reflection prompts into many of the lessons.

Consider scheduling small-group sessions for students who need extra support in using the notebook effectively.

Encourage students to re-read older entries in their Genius Notebooks to compare what they knew, thought or believed at the beginning of the lessons and what they know, think or believe now.

Ask them to think about how they will use what they've learned, and how it will impact how they behave, in the future.

Ask students to share their journal entries with their parents, to encourage family support for the students efforts and explorations in Genius Matters.

Here are some ways to instigate reflective thought and discussion:

- I now know...
- I now realize that...
- Now that I am done, I understand...
- If I were to do this over again, I would...
- I should have included...
- I want my actions to make a difference, so...
- I am really proud of...
- I've learned that...
- If I gave advice to another student about this, I would say...

### Evaluation Suggestions:

How you assess notebook use is dependent on the ages and grade levels of your students. Don't feel compelled to formally grade the work; the purpose of the notebook is reflective in nature. Your attention to how the students use the notebook and your feedback about it as a learning tool can encourage students to use the tool consistently.

The following suggestions provide guidance for both formal and informal evaluation of the notebooks:

- Explain the purposes of the notebooks when you have the students create them.
- Explain at the outset the criteria on which the notebooks will be evaluated.
- Glance at the notebooks each day for the first few weeks of the semester.
- Walk around and give positive comments as students are using their notebooks.
- Use a symbol to monitor timely accomplishment of assignments.
- Build use of the notebooks into the Genius Hour lessons.
- Schedule small-group sessions for students who need extra support in using the notebook effectively.
- Model and support note taking as appropriate for your students' ages and grade levels.
- Don't feel compelled to grade every notebook entry or collect a few each day over a period of time.
- Require students to do a self-assessment of their notebooks.

### Introducing the Notebook:

An example of the narrative I use to introduce the notebook follows.

*This interactive notebook is more than a place to take notes. It is a way of collecting and processing information. Great scholars, artists, and scientists have used notebooks like these and found them to be powerful tools to increase their knowledge, productivity, and expertise. This method of reflective thinking and learning can serve you as well.*

- *Think about your thinking*
- *Apply what you are learning to your own studies*
- *Become better question-askers*
- *Tap into your creative side*
- *Remain open to continuous learning*

*I'm sure you could think of many other benefits! This is your notebook. You are going to keep it for yourself. There is not one right way to record your thoughts and plans. It helps you process and record the important points from our conversations. More importantly, it will help you reflect on what you wish to do with that information and how you might apply the lessons in your study and life.*

*This week, we will practice exploring a few tools and templates that you may want to include in your notebook. I have some examples if you would like to see how other learners have organized theirs. It is important you find something that works for you. Your notebook will be the key to your success in these lessons. At the end of the year, you will have your notes, handouts, and valuable information concerning the habitudes all in one place. I am excited to get our notebooks organized and ready to go!*

### Discussion Questions for Setting Up Your Genius Notebook:

- What went well with the setup?
- What was challenging? How did you overcome it?
- What adjustments did you make for your class?
- If you were to do it again, what would you do differently?

# INTRODUCTION TO GENIUS HOUR



## Genius Hour



### Objective:

Students will understand what Genius Hour is and why it is important.

### Background:

What makes genius hour different is the focus on the process of students becoming more engaged in their work.

One of the best things students will get to do in our Genius Hour is pick their own topics and areas of passion to explore. Students may explore these topics alone or with other students sharing their same passion.

But, that is not the only thing they will be doing.

As we think back on how our classrooms are run, the things geniuses need are sometimes left out. Recognizing genius in our students is more than an act of encouragement or a well-meaning attempt to boost self-esteem; it is critical in our efforts in preparing our students for the global environment that thrives on critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, innovation and effective communication. It's our job to nurture our geniuses so they can change the world.

In a speech given at the 2009 Annual Meeting of National Academy of Sciences, President Barack Obama, brought the importance of passion to the front and center of the academic debate:

*"The call and need of a new era is for greatness. It's for fulfillment, passionate execution and significant contribution. We know students can rise up to the challenge and do amazing work. They can do genius work!"*

To ensure "No genius is left behind," we must consider and commit to a culture and curriculum that honors, nurtures, and sustains the genius in every individual. We must nurture a culture that requires and expects students to demonstrate their genius, and empowers them to share their personal genius with the world.

### Lesson #1:

#### Introduction (~ 20 minutes)

We're going to do something brand new in our classroom.

To get our brains ready, we're going to think critically about this quote:

*"Don't ask yourself what the world needs,  
ask yourself what makes you come alive  
and then go and do that.  
Because what the world needs is  
is people who come alive"*

~ **Howard Thurman**, Author & Philosopher

Ask students to sit with these ideas for a minute.

#### Discussion:

- What does it mean to come alive?
- What are some things that make people come alive?
- What are some reasons it might be important to come alive/share our passions with the world?
- Why does the world need people to come alive?



*What does this quote have to do with the new part of our class? Well, the new part of our class is called Genius Hour, and it's all about coming alive.*

*Most of the time that you are in school, teachers decide what you will study. But during Genius Hour, you get to decide what you learn about and how you spend your time. Many of the lessons we study will help you discover whatever it is that makes you come alive.*

*We will have Genius Hour (specify the frequency and duration, i.e. every day for 45 minutes, or every Tuesday morning for one hour, etc. - whatever fits in your classroom schedule).*

*This is something that classrooms all around the world, have been doing for a couple of years. I can't wait to embark on this journey with you all.*

*Throughout our time of doing Genius Hour, we will be keeping a Genius notebook. We'll talk in more detail about this Genius notebook later on, but to start, we're going to journal some of our initial thoughts about Genius Hour.*

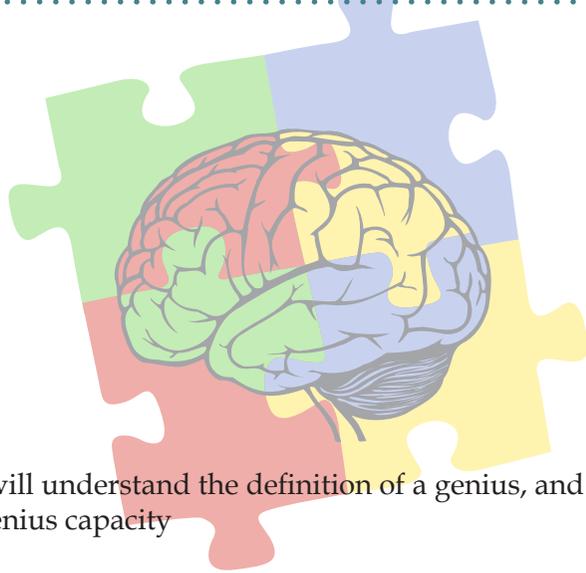
- *What are my thoughts on Genius Hour?*
- *What are my questions about Genius Hour?*
- *What am I excited about?*
- *What am I nervous about?*

These initial journal entries can help you to assess where your students may need some more guidance, and which students may struggle at first with their own plans. Also, ask students to share their journal entries with their parents, to encourage family support for the students' efforts and explorations in Genius Hour.

#### **Discussion Questions for Introduction to Genius Hour:**

- How did you learn about genius hour and what were your first impressions coming into this study?
- What are your initial questions about Genius Hour?
- What about Genius Hour excites you?
- What about Genius Hour makes you nervous?

## WHAT IS GENIUS?



### Objective:

Students will understand the definition of a genius, and that we all have genius capacity

### Background:

Many people think of genius the way that the Merriam Webster dictionary defines it:

ge nius (noun)

1: extraordinary intellectual power especially as manifested in creative activity

2: a person endowed with transcendent mental superiority; specifically: a person with a very high IQ

But does this definition encompass the full spectrum of genius? Do LeBron James and Taylor Swift have “extraordinary intellectual power”? Many people believe that genius is more about the uniquely inspired output of a process, rather than a static personality trait or the meaning we assign to a score on an IQ test.

Genius is developed talent applied in a new or novel way. In other words, we believe genius is less a function of nature than it is a matter of nurture. It isn't something reserved for a special few. It's something accessible to each of us.

Like many, I grew up believing that only a special gifted few could become extraordinary. Too often, genius is presented as a rare gift—something in one's DNA, rather than attributes that could be learned throughout one's life.

In fact, this problem is centuries old—even Einstein and Edison were not recognized for the gifts they possessed. Imagine what they might have achieved with such self-knowledge! Our students deserve to be told early and often that they, too, were born with the potential for genius.

You may not know whether the future Marie Curie or the next Shakespeare is sitting in your classroom. What can be confirmed is this: learners who believe they have unique abilities early on will be more likely than others to...

- Harness their talents more quickly
- Develop self-confidence and a belief that they can succeed
- Maintain their optimism and confidence under stress
- Learn to rely on themselves more than others to get what they need in life
- Live a productive and fulfilled life

The world has been changed by ordinary individuals who were blessed enough to have been encouraged and empowered to become extraordinary.

Once you understand and believe that you are capable of the extraordinary, you will not settle for the ordinary.

The same observation applies to your students. Once you have nurtured them in the habitues, they will realize the strength of their capabilities to be imaginative, curious, self-aware, persistent, courageous, passionate and adaptable. For this development to occur, we must understand and communicate four principles through our instruction.

## Materials:

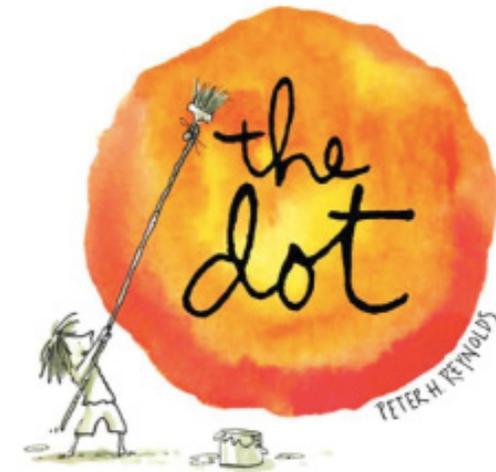
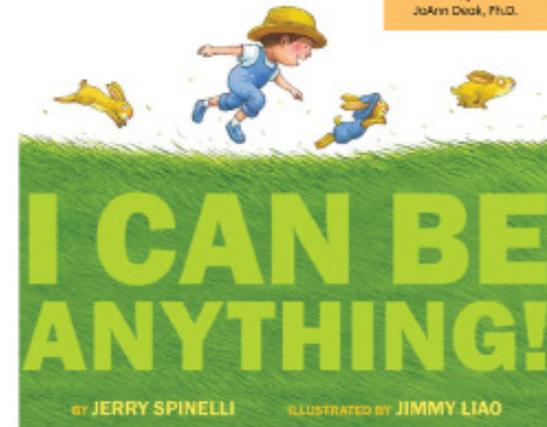
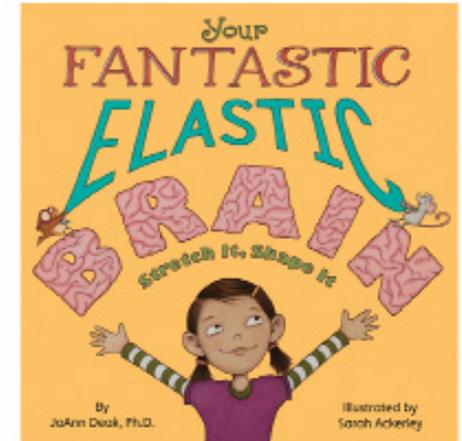
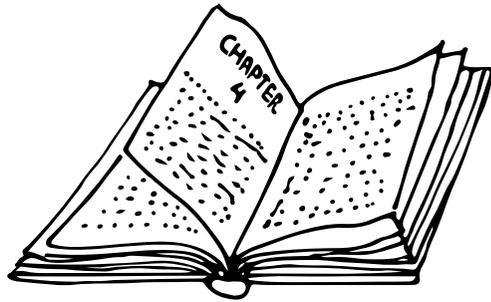
Below are three books and two videos that could supplement this lesson. In our written lesson, we only include one of the videos, but you might decide to use more than one and one or more of the books as well.

## Books:

**Your Fantastic Elastic Brain** by JoAnn Deak - This book shows children that they have the capability to stretch and grow their brains. It also shows the anatomy of the brain.

**I Can Be Anything** by Jerry Spinelli - This book takes readers through hopes and dreams while showing them life's possibilities are endless!

**The Dot** by Peter Reynolds - Vashti thinks she cannot draw. Her teacher tells her to "make a mark and see where it takes you." Vashti merely draws a dot on her paper, and her teacher then says, "Now sign it." The next week Vashti is surprised to see her dot framed on display in the teacher's office. She says, "I can make a better dot than that." She then starts drawing elaborate, colorful dots and realizes she is indeed an artist.



## Videos:

**Lion Lights:** Having found his family's only bull dead after an attack from lions, Richard Turere, a 13-year-old from the Masai community in Kenya, felt there had to be a way to protect his family's livestock from the lions who roam over from Nairobi National Park. Yet he wanted to do so without killing or harming the lions, as many of his tribesmen did.

([https://www.ted.com/talks/richard\\_turere\\_a\\_peace\\_treaty\\_with\\_the\\_lions](https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_turere_a_peace_treaty_with_the_lions))

After scarecrows failed to work, Richard took to walking around his cowshed with a torch. He realized that lions were afraid of moving light. Using parts from a broken flashlight and a motorcycle, he created solar powered flashing lights that kept the lions away from his family's cowshed. His invention has now been adopted at farms all over Kenya. His invention earned him the chance to speak at the TED conference and a scholarship to Brookhouse International School in Kenya.

**Caine's Arcade:** 9-year-old Caine Monroy spent his summer vacation building an elaborate cardboard arcade inside his dad's used auto parts store. On the last day of summer, a filmmaker named Nirvan became Caine's first customer. Watch Caine's Arcade to see what happened next - and how Caine reacted to it!

(<https://vimeo.com/40000072>)



## Lesson:

So, what is a genius?

### Part 1: (~20 minutes)

*Have you heard the word genius? What does it mean to you? (Write and share student responses)*

*A brilliant writer named Mr. Seth Godin writes that genius is the act of solving a problem in a way no one has solved it before.*

*He says genius is not someone who was born smart or can do really hard math problems or memorize a lot of things. He says genius is the act of finding original solutions that matter. A genius looks at something that others are stuck on and gets the world unstuck.*

*We're going to watch this video by a 13 year-old boy from Kenya named Richard. Let's note what was the problem that Richard wanted to solve, and how he did it, and the steps he had to take to find his solution.*

*(Chart student responses)*

*Anyone and everyone can demonstrate genius. But as we saw in this video with Richard, genius takes time, effort and hard work, and usually you have to try a lot of solutions that don't work before you find one that does. Are you willing to do that work? I know you can do it and I'm here to help.*

### Part 2: (~20 minutes)

*Let's brainstorm some problems in our lives that we think we might want to solve. (Chart on board).*

*Let's get to work on practicing our genius. I'd like for all of us to use our genius together to think about how we could solve a problem here at school. (Choose one that relates to school).*

*Let's try to answer these questions about the problem we chose:*

- *How can we make it better?*
- *Is this what is needed most?*
- *What is it we hope to accomplish and what's stopping us?*
- *What are we most proud of?*
- *What is possible?*
- *When can we start?*
- *How will we prevent failure?*
- *Who/how can we make this happen?*
- *What do we regret most?*
- *How can we make the best use of...?*
- *What if we...(Dream big!)*

*Which ones relate to our problem? (Star those that students choose).*

*Let's try to answer these. (Solicit student answers).*

*Now, I want you to practice your genius work on your own. You can choose a new problem that speaks to you or continue working on the one we did together. Now, I want you to look at these questions and think about the problem you are trying to solve. Not all of the questions will relate to your problem. Read through them and choose one or two questions to start with.*

*Write your problem and question(s) on your paper. Take some time to really think about what you're going to do to help with this problem. I will set the timer for 10 minutes. I will walk around and talk with you. You may not finish, but being a genius takes time and hard work. Use your brain. Think things through. It may get messy. But that's what being a genius is all about.*

*Phrases to use with students:*

- *What are you thinking about?*
- *What made you think about this? Tell me more.*
- *Why is this so important?*
- *What research will you need to do?*

## Discussions Questions for What Is Genius:

- In your own words, how do you define the word **genius**?
- How did brainstorming about different ways of problem solving help you define the term, **genius**?
- How did the series of questions accelerate your discussion and support your ability to problem solve?
- Reflect on your student's journey; how has their definition of **genius** evolved from the beginning of the lesson to the end?



## HOW DO GENIUS LEARNERS WORK?

### Objective:

Create the mindset of being a Genius Learner to prepare students to explore and share their genius

### Background:

*Genius is misunderstood as a bolt of lightning.* -Seth Godin, Author

You can't settle for the ordinary when you comprehend you're extraordinary. I hope this statement echoes in your mind as you learn about Genius Hour and use this book with your students.

A careful study of science, history, philosophy and theology emerges a discernable pattern followed by every successful citizen leader. Namely, anyone and everyone who has added significant value to the world around them did so by establishing a cycle of virtuous change by willfully *illuminating, cultivating, replicating and celebrating* the unique potential and genius in those around them.

In other words, they liberated themselves from catering to the court of public opinion and committed to fighting for a cause they believed in. They are clear eyed on who they are and what they stand for, unafraid to amplify their best and work on those areas where they can grow, and choose to march boldly forward in the direction of their dreams.

Genius isn't a label reserved for the chosen few – the poets, painters, sculptors, scientists, or writers – it's an opportunity to become the best possible version of ourselves at a time when the world needs our unique, special and stand-alone contribution. Today, perhaps more than ever.

“Here’s to the Crazy Ones,” Genius Matters challenges students to “Think Different.” This is the mantra of Apple, which produced this montage of revolutionaries, overlaid with a voice that says, “They change things. They push the human race forward. While some see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the ones crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9T\\_5MeFA1M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9T_5MeFA1M))

### Lesson:

Conduct a jigsaw activity for students to learn about successful people and what helped them to achieve that success and share their gifts with the world.

For information on how to conduct a jigsaw:

(<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-jigsaw-cooperative-learning-30599.html>)

Some of our favorite historical examples of people who exemplify sharing their genius with the world include Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Amelia Earhart, Elizabeth Blackwell, Michelangelo, and Leonardo Da Vinci. People currently popular with students who arguably qualify as genius learners include Taylor Swift, Steve Jobs, Sheryl Sandberg, Derek Jeter, Peyton Manning, and Meryl Streep.

Here is a series of 1,000+ biographies, indexed by profession, genders, and race or region of origin; it includes many of the people who we’ve listed (<http://www.sweetsearch.com/biographies>).

After students have completed the jigsaw, have students work with their jigsaw group, and then as a whole class, to compile a list of attributes and habits that they noticed in these successful people.

Talk about how these people were not just born with an extraordinary talent and immediately successful, they worked hard and had to practice sharing it with the world. Just like these role models, we each have a genius and Genius Hour is just the beginning of sharing it with the world. Consider sharing this video of Michael Jordan, and asking them to reflect on it.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH8nTfxwByY>)

This is a meaningful time to share the Genius Hour mantra with your students, and display it in your classroom.

**YOU ARE A** **GENIUS**  
**AND THE WORLD**  
**NEEDS YOUR**  
**CONTRIBUTION!**





Ultimately learning “how geniuses think” is about problem solving, creativity and the creation of excellence. We hope that by sharing strategies of genius, students will develop the tools they need to contribute to the world and help solve some of its biggest problems.

For example, by modeling the innovation strategies of genius inventors, our hope is that our students may one day devise solutions to minimize pollution and make our planet healthier. Or, by modeling how genius teachers inspire their students, a whole new wave of teachers will engage students in a way that will ignite the love of learning and passion to create new things in the world. The chance to change the world is what drives us.

Through our involved deconstruction process, we’ve learned that being a genius is not about raw talent, bigger brains, or superior genetics. It’s about highly effective and exceptionally streamlined mental strategies. With the right mental strategies in place, anyone can achieve “genius” results.

#### Discussions Questions for How Do Genius Learners Work:

- What are your initial thoughts about how to create the mindset of a Genius Leader and prepare students to explore and share their genius?
- The jigsaw activity is one approach to expose students to the attributes, strengths and habits of successful people; what are some other ways you could analyze these genius leaders?
- How does this deconstructive process help students learn about what it means to be a genius?
- What was one thing that surprised you when learning about the geniuses? Why did it surprise you?



## WHAT IS MY GENIUS?

### Objective:

Students will be able to articulate their own unique genius.

### Background:

When introducing Genius Matters, it can be daunting for students to choose their own passion to explore, as many students have never been asked this before. To build the foundation for Genius Hour, students must first gain self-awareness of their own genius.

Before preparing for this unit, read “Nurturing Student Genius.” It contains some stellar responses from students when asked the question “What is your genius?” The comments from my community are also very insightful.

(<http://www.angelamaiers.com/2011/01/nurturing-genius>)

### Lesson: What is my Genius?

#### Part 1: What makes me, me? (~10 minutes)

Introduce this question: what makes me, me?

Have students select one or more of the following questions to respond to in their Genius Hour Notebook:

- What makes me to smile, laugh, or get excited?
- What catches my attention or keeps me interest?
- What do I always manage to find the time to do?
- What do I think about most - even when I don't have time for it?
- What are some interesting things I have done/seen in my life?
- What do I know a lot about?
- What words do others use to describe me?

- What words do I use to describe myself?
- When I am alone, I almost always . . .
- When I am with my friends, we most like to . . .
- How am I different than my friends?
- What makes me unique?
- What makes me most happy?
- What do I most love to do?

Now use your answers to help you answer this question: What makes me, me?

Students can respond in any way to these prompts – writing, illustrating, or reflecting. The goal is self-awareness and expression. There are no right or wrong answers – only discoveries.



## Part 2: What do my classmates see in me? (~10 minutes)

Some students may struggle pinpointing their own genius, and others will overlook things that their classmates may notice about them.

For this part of the activity, each student will write their name on the top of a piece of paper, and tape it to their back. Then, all of the students walk around the room, and anonymously write what they think their classmates' genius is on that student's paper.

When the activity is over, each student will have an additional list of what their classmates think they are good at/what they notice about them. This not only helps students who may struggle with self-awareness, but also can be affirming for students who may have lower self-esteem. Teachers are encouraged to join in the activity for this part.



At the end of the activity, students will have 2 sources of inspiration of their genius. In their Genius Notebooks, have students reflect:

- Did your classmates notice genius in you that you did not have notice yourself?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself?

Encourage students to continue brainstorming their genius to help them begin to build the foundation of their own genius hour focus.

### Supplemental Lesson: My One Special Thing!

For students ready to work at a more advanced level, consider substituting the following lesson instead, or adding it to the above lesson.

In this lesson, we have students work with partners to explore further what makes them unique. It expands on the approach used in the prior lesson, what makes me, me?

*Expressing who we are and what makes us special is hard to do. It is important to find partners who will help us in the process of self-discovery. Today, we are going to work with partners helping one another reflect on the unique and special aspects of our lives and stories.*

*The questions your partner will be asking you are intended to help you discover the things that make you stand out and special. Knowing your talents, passions, and gifts will help you know what to work on as a learner and friend, but also will help you work as a more productive community citizen because you will know exactly what you have to contribute to the world.*

*Remember, some of our best talents are hidden. Let your partner help you uncover exactly what those talents are.*

The following questions can be used to guide and focus the students' interviews with each other. I discuss each question with the students using the examples to help them broaden their thinking about themselves as they interview one another. Comments and examples I discuss with the students accompany each question.

**1. Your knowledge:** What do you know a lot about?

*Your knowledge may be about anything and can come from any source. It could be about animals, sports, musical instruments, history, building or creating something, surviving a difficult time, handling a sickness or disease, secrets to being healthy or happy, or making others happy.*

**2. Your skills:** What do you know how to do well?

*These may include skills developed and used at school, around the house, in sports or games, with hobbies, in recreational activities, or in anything else that you do. Examples: training, experiments, competing or being a competitor, reading well, studying, new technology, video games, taking care of someone, or something else.*

**3. Your strengths:** What is the characteristic that you are most known for?

*When people describe you, what do they say you are good at? Examples: I'm very disciplined. I'm always positive and happy. I always make people feel good or happy. I'm careful. I can really be trusted. I'm not afraid to say what I am thinking.*

**4. Your abilities:** What kinds of things do you believe you have a talent for?

*Examples: I have the ability to organize things. I have the ability to get my friends and family motivated. I'm good at fixing things.*

**5. Your interests:** What kinds of things do you love to do?

*To put it other ways, what have you dreamed of doing if you had the chance? What have you not tried but would like to? What do you like to do in your free time?*

**6. Your experience:** What are some interesting things you have done and seen in your life?

*Our personal experiences not only shape what we know, they can shape who we are and may become. Even if the experiences we have may be ones that we do not wish to repeat, every experience is an important learning tool. Think about what you have experienced that could be used to help you in this new project. What experiences were the most exciting? Difficult? Remarkable? What have you done that you might want build on?*

*Examples: I traveled to another country. I have met someone who . . . I played the piano for five years. I was a part of a club. I tried something scary and I learned to . . . I volunteered.*

**7. Your one special thing!**

*This interview was a treasure map leading us to uncover all your hidden talents. What is the one special thing that stands out now?*

**Discussions Questions for What Is My Genius:**

- How did you introduce this pivotal lesson with your students? What went well? What would you have changed and why?
- Reflect on your students' reactions to their peers recognizing their genius. How do you think this activity helped students see their own genius?
- How did the interview questions elicit your students to respond about themselves? Were there any 'eye-opening' comments or answers?

## PROUD TO BE ME



### Objective:

Identify the importance of “owning your own genius” using a book or personal story.

### Background:

One of my favorite stories about uniqueness is *Only One You* by Linda Kranz.

It is a powerful story of letting one’s genius shine, even if it is different from the norm. It is a wonderful opportunity to discuss with students the balance of “blending in and standing out” we need to find when we are finding our own way.

### From the publisher:

*“There’s only one you in this great big world. Make it a better place. Adri’s mama and papa share some of the wisdom they have gained through the years with their eager son. Their words, simple and powerful, are meant to comfort and guide him as he goes about exploring the world. This exquisitely illustrated book explodes with color and honest insights. Kranz’s uniquely painted rockfish, set against vibrant blue seas, make an unforgettable and truly special impression. Only One You will inspire parents and children of all ages as they swim through life.”*

### Materials Needed:

Only One You (or another book with a similar theme; *Stellaluna*, *The Ugly Duckling* and *Amazing Grace* are but a few); Chart paper

## Lesson:

*This is a story about what it means to be unique.* (Feel free to let students share their ideas on what it means to be unique.)

Then, read *Only One You* by Linda Kranz (or alternative book).

## Lesson Activity: (~20 minutes)

After reading the story, discuss with students:

1. *What makes a person stand out from other people?*
2. *How can people stand out in a good way in the classroom? In the cafeteria? On the playground? At home?*

Discuss how it might feel to perform standout behavior. Do you feel pride? Happiness? Satisfaction?

Using a large piece of butcher paper, create a heading: “Stand Out Behavior! We Sparkle and Shine.”

Continue brainstorming ways people can stand out in a good way, and list them on the chart. Use the chart as a reference for modeling and encouraging standout behavior in the classroom, such as:

- Taking turns
- Holding the door for others
- Listening politely when someone is speaking
- Following directions
- Helping others
- Sharing smiles with one another

Adri’s parents also share that you don’t have to follow the crowd. Use this wisdom to discuss:

- *What does it mean to follow the crowd?*
- *When might it not be a good idea to follow the crowd?*  
(When the crowd is making bad choices or misbehaving, etc.)

Ask students to share instances of when they’ve made their own choices, without following the crowd.

## Discussions Questions for Proud to Be Me:

- What do you think makes a person stand out from other people?
- How will you or how do you, encourage students to stand out in a positive way? Why do you think this works?
- How does it feel to stand out and perform well? How do you think your students feel when they do the same? Pride? Happiness? Satisfaction?
- How can you encourage your students to complement one another and notice good behavior?
- How do you think the book, *Only One You* by Linda Kranz helped your students understand when it might not be a good idea to follow the crowd?
- How do you encourage students to make their own choices and be independent? Why do you think this is important?

## WHAT DO I WANT TO BE?

### Objective:

Students will understand the difference between *doing* and *being*—between actions and inner transformation—and how the two affect each other. Students will relate this concept to their own unique genius.

### Background:

In our task-oriented work world, it is tempting to feel under the thumb of the to-do list. Having tangible items helps us stay organized, but that focus has a downside: it pulls our attention into the micro-world of projects, planning, and deadlines. Students deserve a different focus.

Our success is attributed not only to what we do; it is dependent on who we are. We set young leaders up to fall if we encourage them to envision what they can do before first considering the kind of student and leader they want to be. If we focus on what it's important *to be*, knowing what *to do* becomes much easier.

What students *do* and what they want to *be* should be tightly linked. In this lesson, we turn our attention to getting students *to be* successful learners and leaders. In addition, we show them what that looks like—the actions that lead to that transformation.

In today's lesson, students will reflect on the person they hope to be, and they will see that choosing actions are the way to make that change a reality.

To see one example of this in action, read "A To BE List for Aspiring Leaders." After students complete this lesson, share this piece with them (or an abridged form, for younger students), in order to reinforce these ideas.

(<http://switchandshift.com/a-to-be-list-for-aspiring-leaders-by-angela-maiers>)



## Materials:

Have the students create a “worksheet” in their Genius Notebook as follows:

**Being and Doing**

I want to become...

---

---

These actions are my “bricks”...

1.

2.

3.

How do my actions look?

1.

2.

3.

---

My genius is...

One action for this is...

The way that I do it is...

## Lesson:

### Part 1: (~20 minutes)

Theme: WHAT you are doing/being

Display the following quote and read it out loud:

*“We form habits, and then they form us.”*

– Dr. Rob Gilbert, Professor of Sports Psychology

What does this quote mean to you? (Discuss with students for 1-5 minutes).

*Many of you have an idea of what kind of person you want to be. You might want to be a good student who gets high grades, or a good friend, or a good sibling to you brother or sister. Today, we are going to learn how to become that person.*

*Now, in order to accomplish something, we need to make a goal. So, we need to first make sure that you have a clear picture of that person you want to become.*

*Take a few minutes now and think about the person you’d like to become. You might use adjectives like courageous, friendly, helpful, and hard working. You might also think of roles that you have, like your role as a student or sibling we mentioned before. Don’t limit yourself to the kind of things I’ve said. Think really hard about whom you want to be. After you’ve given it a lot of thought, write down in your Genius Notebook all of the ideas that come to mind.*

(Allow about 5 minutes for students to work).

*Let’s share some of the excellent ideas you came up with.*

Ask students to share their ideas as a class. Affirm and acknowledge the quality of their contributions, and when possible connect their answers to what you have noticed in them. E.g. *“I can tell that you are concerned about being a good friend by the way you treat your fellow students.”*

*Now that we know what we’d like to be, the next step is knowing what to do. Imagine that who you want to be is a building made up of small but sturdy bricks. Each brick is an action. Every time you act, you add a brick to who you want to be. Over time, those bricks create something big and long lasting.*

(In this next part, use an example from another student to complete the explanation).



For example, Kristen said that she wants to be more helpful. If she is chooses to help clear the dishes after dinner, what kind of brick goes into her building? (Ask students for their responses). What if she chooses to leave the table without helping? What kind of brick is that? (Ask students for their responses).

Now look at the things you have listed. Start with three of your favorite items on your list. What are the actions that would be good bricks? Write down as many ideas as you can for those three items.

Allow students about 5 minutes to write their responses.

Let's share a few of your ideas. (Ask students for their response.)

Optional: Have one or two students act out one of their responses.

## Part 2: (~20 minutes)

Theme: HOW you're doing/being it

Explain how doing something good isn't necessarily "being" something good.

e.g. Visiting a friend but being in a bad mood

e.g. Schoolwork that you don't necessarily like: do you huff and puff about it? Or do you get it done because you know it's your responsibility?

*Now each of you has a list of actions that will be like bricks to build the building of who you want to be. But, there is a secret to making those bricks strong and not just look like they're strong. Let me give you an example.*

*If I want to be a good friend, choosing to go hang out with a friend who is having a bad day is a good decision, right? Now, what if I showed up to my friend's house and acted this:*

*(In a bored, disengaged manner) Hey, how's it going . . . Ok, whatever, that's cool . . . (Pretend to take out cell phone and be more interested in it than conversation) Hey, do you have anything to eat?*

*What is wrong with that? (Ask for student responses.)*

*Exactly. That's because it's not just what you do. It's how you do it. You need to remember those ideas of who you want to be and make sure that your actions match it. Let's try another example. If I wanted to be a good student, how would I act when it came time to do my homework? How would I not act?*

*(Ask for student responses.)*

*Take a look at the actions you have written down, the "bricks" that make up who you want to be. Use the next few minutes to write down how you would make those decisions and you how you might not make those decisions.*

(Allow about 5 minutes for student work. Share responses as a class).

*These are some amazing ideas you are all sharing! Finally, I want you to remember your genius from a few days ago. (Day 5: What is My Genius?) Does everybody remember? Take a few moments and think about how your genius acts. I'll give you one minute.*

After one minute, give them an example of how to declare their genius, and then add a way that genius would interact.

*Here is an example. My genius is being incredibly patient. One action for being patient is to get into line when there is a wait for something. The way that I do this is to not get frustrated, roll my eyes, and complain about having to wait.*

Write the following three things:

- *What your genius is.*
- *An action that demonstrates your genius.*
- *How that action matches your genius.*

### **Discussions Questions for What Do I Want to Be?**

- How do you think our actions affect who we are?
- How do you think the “bricks” in your life influence decision-making?
- Why is it important to emphasize the kind of student and leader they want to be first? How will knowing what to do therefore be easier to determine afterwards? Can you think of concrete examples that prove that actions lead to transformation?

## **DAYS 8 THROUGH 13:**

### *Accelerating Your Genius*



We are going to use a technique that Heard calls heart mapping. It is one that poets, writers, storytellers, and leaders use. Your heart map is a representation of all the important things that are in your heart, all the things that matter to you. The map can include anything that has stayed in your heart because you care a lot about it – people and places you care about, moments and memories that have stayed with you, or things you love to do.

Let's think about some questions to get us started on creating our heart maps:

- What has really affected your heart?
- What people have been important to you?
- What are some experiences or central events that you will never forget?
- What happy or sad memories do you have?
- What secrets have you kept in your heart?
- What small or big things are important to you?

As students display and share whom they are and what they are most passionate about, I use these additional questions to help them explore the ideas further and take the conversation even deeper:

- Should some things be outside the heart and others inside?
- Do you want to draw more than one heart? Happy or sad? Secret or open?
- What's at the center of your heart? What occupies the outer edges?
- Do different colors represent different emotions, events, or relationships?
- Are there parts of your heart you are willing to share with others? Parts you want to keep private how will you represent both?

How we see ourselves inside determines how and why we do our work with and around others. It is the work of knowing ourselves from the inside out that allows us to work successfully on the outside. Heart maps are a wonderful way to sharpen that inner vision.

- The students' participation in this activity may vary. Sometimes I'll record students' contributions on chart paper or a whiteboard.
- Other times, I let the conversation flow without providing any written support.
- Alternatively, I sometimes conclude the lesson by having students record their heart maps in their Genius Notebooks.
- I encourage them to review their heart maps periodically to add new ideas that show their growth in self-awareness.

## Lesson 2: (optional)

When I find a tech tool that can enhance a lesson, I want to shout it from the rooftops. **SMART Learning Suite™** addresses the essential need to create human connections through heart share.



A key component of SMART Learning Suite, **SMART amp™** ([education.smarttech.com](http://education.smarttech.com)), encourages students to not only create heartbreaks in a digital blank canvas, but also magnify their voice and collaborate on a global scale.

Warm Up: without talking, ask your students to share something about themselves on their blank canvas with the whole class like, what is your genius? SMART amp allows students to connect with others in the group using a chat feature discussing their genius or interests. This could also lead to groups sharing common ideas and interests.

Main Lesson: using the same lesson inspired by Georgia Heard, ask students to create their heart maps on the blank canvas using a variety of design features and the ability to embed music, art, graphics, movie clips and writing into a limitless workspace. SMART amp enables students to share their heart maps with classrooms around the globe to solve problems together.

SMART amp takes this lesson to a whole new level. Read more about SMART amp in "Implementation of Genius Matters" at the end of the book.

Try SMART amp for 60 days for free - ([smartamp.com/trial](http://smartamp.com/trial))



For other examples of heart-mapping activities with students, with vivid images of the completed process, read:

### **Ruth Manna’s post on Scholastic:**

([http://blogs.scholastic.com/top\\_teaching/2011/01/heart-maps-and-writing.html](http://blogs.scholastic.com/top_teaching/2011/01/heart-maps-and-writing.html))

### **Helping Students Choose2Matter, by Karen McMillan:**

(<http://www.notesfrommcteach.com/2013/06/helping-students-choose2matter-part-2.html>)

### **Heartbreak Mapping in Actions by Joy Kirr:**

(<http://www.angelamaiers.com/2013/11/heartbreak-mapping-in-action/>)

### **Supplemental Activity: Telling Your Story**

After Heartbreak Mapping, students begin to articulate their story about what matters most to them and why. Usually it is a personal connection or experience that calls students to stand up, be heard and take action.

Storytelling is a powerful communication tool, one to rekindle people’s excitement, imagination and sense of hope. Take the reins of your own story seriously. If you share your story with enthusiasm, vulnerability and passion, you naturally invite others to do the same. Often, when one student or teacher opens up and shares their story, others do the same. Try shaping and sharing your story, the world wants to know more about you and where you come from. What moves you? Why do you do what you do? How did you get to where you are today?

Here are a few questions to ask yourself when compiling your story. Take a few moments to think about the questions below. Write your answers in your Genius Notebook.

- What makes me, me?
- Who and what inspire me most?
- What things am I most curious about?
- What do I think about so much that it keeps me awake at night?
- What matters most to me, and why?
- How did I begin to care so much about the things that matter to me?
- Why are these things so personal for me?
- If I could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

To answer the last few questions, you might focus on one of the “choice points” in your life, which Marshall Ganz defined as “moments in our lives when values are formed because of a need to choose in the face of great uncertainty.” Ganz suggests your story include these three elements:

1. **Challenge:** What was the specific challenge you faced? What was so challenging about it? Why was it your challenge?
2. **Choice:** What was the specific choice you made? Why? Where did you get the courage (or not)? Where did you get the hope (or not)?
3. **Outcome:** What happened as a result of your choice? How did it feel? What hope can it give us? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

Allow yourself to be vulnerable and brave. Your authenticity and credibility is essential to you being a good storyteller.

Here is an example for telling your story, Watch “Personal Statement” by Catherine Broyles (<https://vimeo.com/86149245>)

### **Discussions Questions for My Passion, My Heart:**

- How does digging deep into your heartbreak influence our actions and behavior?
- Reflect on how this lesson impacted your students. Did you learn something new about your students? How did this lesson propel their reflection?
- How does personal storytelling affect your students? Do you notice anything different when students experienced the heartbreak mapping?
- How did you share your students’ heartbreak maps? What went well? What would you have done differently and why?
- Do you believe that students graduating from high school should be able to create a personal statement that declares who they are and what their passions are? Why or why not?
- Was it hard for you to tell your story?
- Can you imagine it might get easier with time?
- Will you telling your story make it easier for your students to tell theirs?

## MY PASSION FILE

### Objective:

Students will develop a profile of their strengths and passions.

I recently discovered a tool that can help provide more of a framework for helping kids to discover and pursue a passion.

### Background:

**Thrively** is a website for students, teachers and parents that combines strength-based learning principles with amazing real world experiences. It's a terrific way to start when launching Genius Hour in the classroom. It not only can help students discover a new passion, but also pursue that passion once they've found it.

Sign up at [www.thrively.com/classroom](http://www.thrively.com/classroom) or send questions to [info@thrively.com](mailto:info@thrively.com).



# Thrively

### Discover Strengths:

Begin with Thrively's Strength Assessment. Two pediatric experts in California who specialize in childhood development created this "soft skills" survey. This is the perfect exercise to do at the beginning of the year, or when you start Genius Hour, so you can get to know your students a little better and help them get to know themselves a little better, too.

The online quiz takes about 30 minutes and can be done in one class period. The questions examine 23 different strength areas, such as focus, compassion, leadership, analytical ability, and more. The result of the quiz is a personal Strength Profile that is uplifting, positive, and energizing.

Your students will see once they finish the Strength Assessment a positive write-up showing their top 5 strengths, what they mean, and how they can apply them in life.

After your students have taken the Strength Assessment and reviewed the results, ask them to take ten minutes to reflect in their Genius Notebook on whether they agree with the findings, and how they feel about them.

### Discussions Questions for My Passion Profile:

- How do you think a Strength Assessment helps your students? Were there any surprises that stood out?
- How did your students feel about their results?
- How do you see your students using the results to propel their genius?
- Now that you know your students' strengths, how can you support them so they capitalize on this insight?

## MY PASSION PRACTICE



### Objective:

Students will learn how to leverage their strengths and explore their passions.

Once students have taken the Strength Assessment, they can then learn how to build upon the strengths and their interests. Today's lesson will revolve around exploring these aspects of Thrively.

### Explore Enrichment:

Thrively matches strengths found during the assessment to an enormous variety of real-world opportunities, such as camps, apps, internships, and even field trips. These resources have been "crowd-sourced" by people from all over the world.

It can recommend an educational app to the whole class to support what they are learning in school, volunteer opportunities to help them complete required service hours, or a camp to a student with a passion for a certain interest.

### Learn About Career Pathways:

Students can explore interesting career pathways and what it takes to pursue them. View day-in-the-life videos of real professionals at work. Explore activity offerings in your area that could give students a taste of what that career could be like.

### Track Experiences:

Students can add activities to their profile that they have done in the past, to help build the foundation for a Digital Portfolio. When students track their "highlights," they'll be able to reference them easily in the future when it comes time for college or internship applications.

### Ignite a Spark:

The Sparks section of Thrively is a collection of websites that contain enrichment designed for students. The content is embedded into the Thrively site, so students get the benefit of carefully curated news and enrichment while never leaving Thrively. Read current events, learn how to code, do creative writing exercises, view suggested reading lists, learn about music history, and more. Students can write journal entries about what they've read or learned, which you can read right from your teacher dashboard.

### Snapshot:

Teachers and Principals get to see a "snapshot" of the strengths, interests, and career aspirations at the heart of your student body.

While Genius Hour will reveal your students' passions, turning them into concrete activities can be game-changing; tools like Thrively are crucial in getting students to make the leap outside the classroom walls.

### Discussions Questions for My Passion Practice:

- After looking at Thrively and encouraging students to match their strengths during the assessment to real-world opportunities, how are you supporting and fostering your students in this stage?
- Have any of your students unleashed an inner passion? Share your success stories.
- How can you engage students who are holding back and refraining from engaging?
- What have your students done to change their passions into concrete activities or actions both inside and outside the classroom walls?

## THE WORLD NEEDS YOUR CONTRIBUTION - NOW

---



### Objective:

Students will learn that they are ready and able to change the world - today! Here are a few examples of kids making the impossible, possible.

### Background:

Some educators and parents actually tell us that we shouldn't tell students they are geniuses that can change the world, because it sets unrealistic expectations.

Unrealistic for whom?

Fortunately, we've sat side-by-side with tens of thousands of students, and we've seen first-hand that this generation is much different than the ones that preceded it. Today's young people are idealistic because they see things that we once thought were "impossible" happening every day.

What happens when students decide they can change the world?

They do.

Frances Hesselbein, former CEO of Girl Scouts of America, says that:

*"Millennials are most like the leaders in the 1930s-40s, now called the Greatest Generation....They need projects that utilize their knowledge and skills that can connect with their philosophical or deeper interests. They recognize the importance of teamwork and inclusion – they are experts at leveraging the efforts of others to achieve results and share rewards...These leaders are sending a powerful message of building trust, of ethics in action, of the power of diversity, of inclusion, of courage and resourcefulness."*

Yet even as young people behave courageously and resourcefully, much of what they hear from adults is despair, cynicism, all that is wrong with the world and that nothing will ever change.

The last part - the belief that change is impossible - is the single biggest hindrance to making it happen. We must protect the optimism of our youth, because the future demands it. Protect their sense of possibility. Without it, they despair, and it's hard to change the world from despair. We've seen again and again how little it takes to bring their genius, their hope, their belief that they can make a difference back to the surface and set them on their path to changing the world.

Consider the following statement:

*"When you grow up you tend to get told the world is the way it is and you're life is just to live your life inside the world. Try not to bash into the walls too much. Try to have a nice family, have fun, save a little money.*

*That's a very limited life.*

*Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact: Everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you and you can change it, you can influence it, you can build your own things that other people can use.*

*Once you learn that, you'll never be the same again"*

**Steve Jobs (1955 - 2011)**

A few summers ago, a student wrote a blog post about a group service trip to a third-world country. He described very challenging living conditions. He reported that the whole group vowed "to come back here and help one day." He concluded his post by vowing again to return "when I grow up."

What is he waiting for?

People of every age can begin to change the world today. Right now. This very second.

Show students that you take their ideas seriously and believe there is a global audience for those ideas. In time, students will believe the same.

## Lesson:

As is always the case, adults today are talking about our young people and trying to define who the students of this generation are.

One view was expressed in an article by Joel Klein in Time Magazine, titled "Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation."

(<http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>)

Depending on their age, have students read this article, or read it to them (in whole or in part).

Ask them to react to the article. Do they think it fairly describes their generation? Does it fairly describe them? Is this who they want to be, and how they want their generation to be known?

I have quite another view of students today, as expressed in this article: (<http://switchandshift.com/an-open-letter-to-millennials-thank-you-for-what-i-see-in-you.>)

Again, depending on their age, have students read this article, or read it to them (in whole or in part).

Ask them to react to the article. Do they think it fairly describes their generation? Does it fairly describe them? Is this who they want to be, and how they want their generation to be known?

Advanced students may want to also read, "A Beginner's Mind," and ponder the following quote:

(<http://www.fastcompany.com/918964/beginners-mind>)

*"Because they don't know that what I'm asking them to do is impossible"*

~ **Seymour Cray**, on why he hired young engineers to build the 1st supercomputer

#Choose2Matter

Now let's consider the stories of a few young people who recently have changed the world. Read several, or all, of these brief posts to your students and show them the accompanying photograph.

Building upon some of the content from the first ten days, ask the students to think and reflect on this posts, and then answer these questions in their Genius Notebook:

1. What problem did these students face? How did they solve it? Would you say their action demonstrated genius thinking?
2. What traits of a genius leader and learner did these students exhibit? What is their genius?
3. Did these students have any extraordinary skill, knowledge or resources available to them that aren't available to most students? Or would it be reasonable to say that any student could accomplish what some of these students accomplished, if they are willing to put in the hard work, imagination and creativity necessary to make it happen?

Or, students can work in small groups learning about one student genius leader and present responses to the class, answering the questions above.

### Rachel Wheeler - Building Homes in Haiti

Rachel Wheeler, a sixth grader at the time, was inspired to help those affected by the earthquake in Haiti. She explained to The Huffington Post, "You can't just sit around and think about doing it. You got to actually get out there and do it."

So she began working with Food for the Poor, which feeds people around the world, and worked to donate enough money to build 27 homes in an area hit hard by the earthquake.

Not satisfied with her initial efforts, she continued her fundraising and gathered enough support to rebuild a school destroyed during the earthquake.

Because of her efforts, 350 students attend a brand new school stocked with supplies. Rachel kept up her work with the goal of building an additional 20 homes, and she has raised a total of over \$175,000 for the village.

([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/14/rachel-wheeler-food-for-poor\\_n\\_1093732.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/14/rachel-wheeler-food-for-poor_n_1093732.html))

## Dylan Siegel – Author and Fundraiser

When Dylan Siegel’s best friend was diagnosed with a rare liver disease in 2012, Dylan decided to do something about it. He wrote a book called *Chocolate Bar*, because in his world, “that’s so chocolate bar” is a high form of praise. This is because Dylan was six years old. He began selling copies of the book for \$20 each.

Dr. David Weinstein, who leads the main team researching these diseases, thought it was a cute idea. But when sales of the book topped \$400,000, Dr. Weinstein remarked, “[Dylan has] raised more money for this disease than all the medical foundations and all the grants combined. Ever.”

The Global Genes Project, which advocates for rare disease research, honored Dylan and his friend with the RARE Champion Award – typically given to grown-ups.

Dylan didn’t stop there. He designed other products for sale, and has now raised more than \$1 million. Now 8, he vows not to stop raising money until the disease is cured.

“Kids can change the world just like any of us,” Dr. Siegel told ABC News. (<http://www.chocolatebarbook.com>, <https://globalgenes.org>)

## Mallory Fundora – Founder of Project Yesu

In the fall of 2010, 11-year-old Mallory Fundora put only one item on her Christmas wish list: she wanted money to help orphans from Uganda that she had met when their choir visited her church.

From this simple wish, Mallory became the founder of Project Yesu, a not-for-profit organization that provides food, medicine and education for children in Uganda. Through an array of fundraising activities, Project Yesu has raised more than \$30,000. Her efforts were recognized by a resolution in the Tennessee House of Representatives, which deemed her “an intrepid young soul with extraordinary compassion.”

Mallory says, “I want to show people what a difference one person can make...Kids have good ideas, and you know what? We don’t know all the reasons why it won’t work, we just know we what we want to do.”

In the fall of 2013, Choose2Matter presented Mallory with the first Bammy Award for Student Initiative. She said that receiving a national award is the first thing that made teachers in her school take her efforts seriously:

*From the time I started Project Yesu, only 3 out of 14 teachers ever showed any interest in what I am doing in Uganda...What about caring about students’ passions? Showing interest in their lives? Encouraging them, finding their spark and helping them grow it, even if it doesn’t make them better on a standardized test?”*

To learn more, watch this video Mallory made about her travels in Uganda:

(<http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/108/Bill/HJR0541.pdf>)

(<http://www.projectyesu.org>, <http://www.bammyawards.org/index.php>)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InjWik6PIUs&feature=youtu.be>)

## Kaitlin Brand – Published Video About Her Mother’s Suicide

In a moving and courageous video, Kaitlin Brand, a 16-year-old from Grand Rapids, Michigan, shares her very personal message about suicide.

Although Kaitlin doesn’t say a single word, her video speaks volumes, as she holds up pieces of paper explaining how she found her Mom hanging in her backyard after committing suicide.

Strong but humble, Kaitlin asks viewers to seek help if they are having suicidal thoughts.

The video resonated with viewers and soon went viral. Her story was picked up by news agencies across the country.

Even though her video has over 800,000 views, it’s impossible to put a number on the impact of her simple act of courage. People around the world wrote to Kaitlin to share how she gave them the strength to deal with crises in their own lives, and it all started with a webcam and a story.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InjWik6PIUs&feature=youtu.be>)

### **Katie Stagliano** – Founder of Katie’s Krops

After Katie Stagliano grew a 40-pound cabbage and fed people at a soup kitchen with her cabbage, she knew she had to do more. Even though Katie was in the third grade, she felt she could help others.

As Katie explains, “My dream is that there are no hungry people.”

Since that time over five years ago, Katie has persuaded her high school to grow food and has worked with large organizations to grow food for soup kitchens. She recently published a children’s book, *Katie’s Cabbage*, that tells her story of generosity and hope. She has no plans to stop. As Katie says, “I want more people to get involved, more people to help in the fight against hunger. Growing vegetables is fun and it is so great to help people. If I can do it, anyone can.”

(<http://katiekrops.com/home.html> )

(<http://www.amazon.com/Katies-Cabbage-Young-Palmetto-Books-ebook/dp/B00MGRV0IQ>)

### **Cassandra Lin** – Co-Founder of Project T.G.I.F.

Cassandra Lin, a Westerly 7th grader, found the solution to many problems at once when she co-founded Project T.G.I.F. (Turn Grease Into Fuel).

While attending the Rhode Island Green Expo in 2008, Lin learned it is possible to turn cooking oil into biodiesel fuel. She was also aware that her community had a program for helping those in need with heating oil during the winter.

As Lin explained to Business Innovation Factory, she also knew that sewage pipes in her town were being clogged with the very cooking oil that could be turned into biodiesel. “We looked at an array of problems to see what we could solve in our own community.”

To date, Project TGIF has donated over 29,000 gallons of BioHeat to local charities in Rhode Island, heating the homes of 290 local families, valued at over \$120,000.

(<http://www.businessinnovationfactory.com/summit/innovator/cassandra-lin>)

(<http://www.projecttgif.com>)

### **Mikey Stolzenberg** – Mikey’s Run Raised \$230,000 for Bombing Victims

After the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, 13-year-old Mikey Stolzenberg wanted to help the survivors of the blast.

Mikey knew what the amputees would have to deal with. In 2008, his hands and feet were amputated in an effort to save his life from a skin infection that turned into septic shock, and then gangrene. Mikey decided to raise one million dollars to donate to the survivors of the bombing.

He and his 17-year-old brother Harris created Mikey’s run and declared that Harris would run the 2014 Boston Marathon in exchange for donations to Boston’s One Fund to support survivors of the bombing.

Even more extraordinary than Mikey’s concern for others and his fundraising ability was the wisdom that this young teen shared. Mikey spoke to the Sun Sentinel about how the people who lost limbs in the bombing would feel:

“First, they will be sad. They are losing something they will never get back, and it’s scary. I was scared. But they’ll be OK. They just don’t know that yet.”

(<http://mikeysrun.com>)

([http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2013-06-15/news/fl-oprah-quadruple-amputee-20130614\\_1\\_boston-marathon-bombings-oprah-winfrey-mikeysrun-com](http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2013-06-15/news/fl-oprah-quadruple-amputee-20130614_1_boston-marathon-bombings-oprah-winfrey-mikeysrun-com))

### **Malala Yousafzai** – Fights for All Women to Have Access to Education

In October 2012, a member of Pakistan’s Taliban tried to silence support for girls’ access to education by shooting an outspoken, and well-spoken, proponent of women empowerment.

The person who so frightened the Taliban with her words was 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai.

Malala recovered from her injuries and is now bringing even greater attention to the issue of universal access to education.

July 12, 2013, Malala’s 16th birthday, was declared “Malala Day” by the United Nations.

Malala delivered a powerful speech at the UN, in which she said:

*“Let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world. Education is the only solution.”*

In 2014, Malala became the youngest-ever Nobel Laureate when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Malala celebrated her 18th birthday by opening a school for Syrian Refugee girls.

In a 2014 TED Talk, Malala's father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, told stories from his daughter's life. He said to the audience: "Why is my daughter so strong? Because I didn't clip her wings."

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rNhZu3ttIU>)

([http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2014/yousafzai-facts.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2014/yousafzai-facts.html))

(<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/07/12/422358157/malala-turns-18-and-opens-a-school-for-syrian-refugee-girls>)

([http://www.ted.com/talks/ziauddin\\_yousafzai\\_my\\_daughter\\_malala?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/ziauddin_yousafzai_my_daughter_malala?language=en))

### Jack Andraka – Invented Cancer Detection Test

Jack Andraka was only 15 years old when he developed a novel way to test for pancreatic cancer after a family friend died of the disease.

In an inspiring TED Talk, Andraka explained how, even after 200 professors refused to work with him, he persevered in his efforts, "undeterred, due to my teenage optimism."

Approximately 40,000 people die a year from pancreatic cancer, because by the time symptoms are presented in patients it is often too late for doctors to help. Andraka's test may some day save tens of thousands of lives each year.

In 2012, Jack became the only high school freshman to win the \$75,000 first prize at the Intel Science and Engineering Fair. He has since been profiled on CNN and 60 Minutes, and has had a personal audience with present and past US Presidents, as well as the Pope.

([http://www.ted.com/speakers/jack\\_andraka](http://www.ted.com/speakers/jack_andraka))

Discussion Questions for The World Needs Your Contribution:

- The authors provide examples of young people who are changing the world. Which one resonated the most with you? Which one did your students most identify with?
- Please share other remarkable examples of students changing the world, including any links to online information about their efforts.

## I AM; YOU ARE



### Objective:

Students will increase their self-awareness and learn to notice and appreciate qualities of their classmates.

### Background:

Describing the elements of your identity is not an easy task. We can help student build their self-awareness and engage in self-reflection.

This lesson helps students focus on the following aspects of self:

- What they especially like
- What they are proud of
- What impacts and moves them
- What they might like or wish to change
- Who influences them
- How they feel at the moment about their life

## Materials:

A supply of mirrors equal to roughly half the students in the class.

## Lesson:

Begin by explaining to students that they will be thinking about themselves and all the qualities they are proud of or love about themselves.

These qualities can be physical: Example, I am a great dancer. Or they could be inside qualities of their confidence or abilities. I am a loyal friend. I am sympathetic.

Remind students that this exercise is not about ego and bragging; it is about being proud your own strengths and recognizing the strengths in the genius learners and leaders around us.

### 1. Share that the way we are going to share how they feel, how they see others and ourselves is in the form of a poem.

- Write these two words on the board: I AM...
- The poems we create will be about 10 lines.
- There are no rules except that each stanza and statement will begin with "I am..."
- Statements can be positive, negative, or neutral, but they should be true.

### 2. Give an example of your own "I am..." poem.

I am a teacher.

I am a mom.

I am a wife.

I am a speaker.

I am a writer.

I am most happy when I am with children.

I am so proud of the students I teach.

I am grateful to be doing something I am so passionate about.

I am Mrs. Maiers.

### 3. Ask students to write ten "I am..." statements on their paper.

They can record this in their Genius Notebook or on paper. If they have trouble starting, suggest a few adjectives, nouns and descriptions based on your observations.

### 4. When students have completed this, organize them to into pairs. Have students choose which partner will go first.

### 5. Pass out a mirror to each pair and have one partner be the listener and hold up the mirror so that the partner who is reading can see himself or herself in the mirror.

To help ignite their curiosity and appreciation for one another have students practice giving and receiving compliments by describing positive aspects about their peers by having them stand by a chalkboard or large white board while the class shares positive qualities about their classmates.

After each student has had a chance to “take a seat,” pair students up to write their poems with each line beginning: “You Are”

When students have finished writing their qualities that are most appreciated and valued about their partner, have both partners come up and share in front of the class.

### Reflection Questions With Students:

- How did it feel to share these qualities with your partner?
- Why did you choose these words or qualities?
- Was it harder to write about yourself or to hear what others wrote about you?
- How did hearing your poem feel?
- What surprised you most about what your partner said?

### Discussion Questions for I Am; You Are:

- Why do we build student’s self-awareness and help them engage in self-reflection?
- What is the difference between bragging about your ego and being proud of your own strengths? How did you differentiate these two viewpoints with your students?
- How did the poem process contribute to unleashing your student’s genius?
- What was different about the students writing poems about themselves versus writing poems about their classmates? Overall, how did this affect your class dynamics?

## SELF-AWARENESS

---

### Objective:

Students will understand self-awareness.

### Background:

This book emphasizes *process, not projects*. If students can navigate the process of learning, they can successfully achieve a wide range of outcomes. That’s why it’s vital to cultivate in them the skill of self-awareness.

Self-awareness is process. It reveals to students their own strengths, weaknesses, and behaviors. It gives them the power to learn and change independently in real-time.

One of the great benefits of Genius Matters is that students drive their own learning. This requires that they think ahead, plan, and react to change.

A common worry about starting Genius Matters is how to manage 25+ unique geniuses, all learning different content and pursuing diverse passions. Instilling self-awareness in students is key to making this transition.

The first lesson below gets students to think critically about their own individual traits. Students will answer from a list of open-ended questions as they explore what makes them unique.

The second lesson serves as an introduction to managing their brain’s executive functions – the “command and control” center in the pre-frontal cortex. This activity shows students how to listen to the inner thoughts they experience as they work and to understand how those thoughts can both engage and distract them.

Self-awareness is a skill that is never fully mastered. However, with continual practice, students develop habits that allow them to work and learn without someone – often their teacher – looking over their shoulder.

## Lesson:

### Part 1: (~20 minutes)

*Class, who do you think has the biggest effect on how much you learn?*

[React to the responses]

*Those are all excellent responses. Everyone you mentioned has a big impact on your learning and your success. However, I want you to know that the most important person to your learning . . . is you! You have the most power over the things you want to accomplish.*

*But, just knowing that fact doesn't mean a whole lot just yet. This knowledge is like a tool that you need to learn how to use. Let me give you an example.*

*What are some tools that people use every day?*

*(Answer several responses. When you land on a good response, use it to further your discussion. I'll use a computer for our example.)*

*A computer, that's a very good example of a tool. Now, if you had never used a computer before and someone just gave one to you and said, "Here you go," would you know what to do with it? It would be pretty difficult, right? You would have to know how to plug it in, how to turn it on, and what different applications do.*

*You are a bit like that computer. The more you know about how you work, the more you are able to do. Today, we are going to do just that.*

*Bring their attention to their notes from the previous lesson, "I Am, You Are."*

*Here we have a list of statements that follow the words, "I Am."  
Take a look at all these statements.*

*Now ask yourself this question - which may be the hardest one you've ever answered: "What Makes Me, Me?"*

*You may have a lot of different answers to this question. Some of them you can express in writing, while others might work well with a drawing, a poem, or whatever you think works best.*

*In a minute, you are going to provide a variety of answers. Try to do a few that seem easy and a few that seem hard. Keep working until I say, "Stop."*

Allow 10 minutes for students to work on the list. This is a great time to walk around the room and ask questions about their responses. You'll gain some amazing insights!

Have students share one interesting thing they wrote/created.

### Part 2: (~20 minutes)

*Wow, I am amazed at everything I saw around the room. The next step in learning more about how we work is to look at what we'll call our "inner voice." Let me explain what the inner voice is.*

*When I read, there is silent conversation going on. In my head, I hear a voice reading the words. It lets me know if I am reciting the words accurately and that they sound like I am talking aloud and not robotic.*

*But another voice I am aware of and attend to is the voice that talks to and interacts with the writer. This is the voice that helps me understand the words I hear myself reciting. I call that my inner voice, because it is like I am having the conversation with the author inside my head. Thinking about the writer in this way helps me interact with the ideas in the book.*

*However, the inner voice is there more than just when we read. Our inner voice is also there when you wake up in the morning and think to yourself, "I'm really excited for today" – or perhaps "I'm still tired and want to go back to bed." Your inner voice is there when you're working really hard on something and it says, "Come on, just a little bit longer. Keep going.*

*That inner voice is there when you're happy or sad, when you're tired or full of energy, when you're alone or with other people.*

Share a story of your own inner voice.

*Take a moment and think about a time when you had that inner voice talking inside.*

Pause for a few moments, and then ask for a few students to share. Ask them if the voice had any effect on how they felt or what they did.

The most important thing to know about your inner voice is that you have control over it. You can choose the things your voice says. And, most importantly, what your voice says has an impact on how you act. The more positive things that your inner voice says, the more you are able to learn and be the best you can be. That's why you are going to plan for what your inner voice will say at different times.

### Discussion Questions for Self-Awareness:

- Genius Matters emphasizes process, not projects; what is the difference between the two and how do you explain this to your students?
- How does this two-part lesson develop self-awareness and reveal students' strengths, weaknesses, and behaviors?
- Why do you think it is important for students to drive their own learning during Genius Hour?
- How do these lessons build a foundation for Genius Hour? What has worked well and what still needs scaffolding?



## LISTENING LOUDLY



### Objective:

To truly listen to another person for an uninterrupted period of time and respond in a meaningful way; to hear others, look at them in their eyes and understand what they say.

### Background:

With students now more self-aware, Listening Loudly is an opportunity to courageously share their story several times in a particular format, and also learn to be an excellent listener. In "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," Stephen Covey writes:

*"Most people listen with the intent to reply, not to understand. You listen to yourself as you prepare in your mind what you are going to say. You filter everything you hear through your life experiences, your frame of reference. You decide prematurely what the other person means before he or she finishes speaking."*

This exercise forces students to "listen loudly" – to truly hear every word the speaker says. In the process, it will build empathy, understanding and self-awareness.

### The Process:

- Everyone should find a partner, ideally someone they do not know well.
- Partners sit facing one another, on the floor or in chairs.

- One person in each pair shares his or her story with a partner, who listens closely. Other prompts that can be used, what matters most to you and why?
- After 90 seconds, the listener thanks the teller for sharing the story and repeats the most important parts of it back to the storyteller in 45 seconds.
- The listener then writes down a few words about the storyteller that articulate some qualities they discovered about the person, but does not yet share these words! This can be done on t-shirts or on paper taped to their backs.
- The partners switch places, with the person who listened first now telling their story, and the first storyteller now in the role of listener.
- After 90 seconds, the listener repeats the main parts back to the teller in 45 seconds, and writes a few words about the storyteller that articulate some qualities they discovered about the person, but does not yet share these words!
- Everyone switches partners, and then does it all again a second time.
- After three rounds, everyone gets to see the words the other people wrote about them.

Now, bring the class together and facilitate a discussion with these prompts:

- *What was the experience like for you?*
- *What did you learn about storytelling through this exercise?*
- *Was the second and third round easier or harder?*
- *Did you revise your story for the later rounds after listening to your partners' stories?*
- *Did you share any surprising, unexpected connections with your partner?*
- *Were you surprised by what your partners wrote about you?*

This is also a great opportunity for students to reflect in their Genius Notebooks about this experience and use the questions above as personal prompts.

### Discussion Questions for Listening Loudly:

- What do you think will emerge from this activity?
- What challenges do you anticipate?
- What are the important takeaways from doing this with your students?

## SEEING CLEARLY



### Objective:

Seeing Clearly is an exercise that enables you and your students to see each other without saying a word. It's intense and uncomfortable, but like the previous exercise, it builds empathy and understanding by allowing us to see each other clearly.

### Background:

When we fail to see our students—or their parents, or our colleagues or leaders - for who they are and where they are, now, we miss an opportunity. We end up addressing them on one level, when meeting them on another level is far more likely to lead to an amicable outcome.

Seeing Clearly is an exercise that will enable your students to see each other without saying a word. It's intense and uncomfortable, but like the previous exercise, it builds empathy and understanding by enabling us to see each other clearly.

### Activity:

First watch this video in which citizens of Europe and recent refugees were challenged to stare into each other's eyes for four minutes. See just how powerful this activity can be!

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7XhrXUoD6U>)

More than 50 years ago, a 21-year-old man wrote a song that you've likely sung hundreds of times. You may even know all or most of the words. Now, we invite you to watch and listen to a haunting cover of the song, and to hear it again for the very first time. You may also wish to read the lyrics.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bk7RVw3I8eg>)

### The Process:

- Everyone should find a partner, ideally someone they do not know well.
- Partners sit facing one another, knee to knee, on the floor or in chairs.
- When the facilitator says, "Go," the parties stare directly into each other's eyes for 90 seconds. No one says a word!
- After 90 seconds, each partner looks at the other and says their name, followed by "You Matter."
- Switch partners and do it all again.

After three rounds, bring the whole group back together for reflection. Ask questions such as:

- What was the experience like for you?
- Were the second and third rounds easier or harder?

### Discussion Questions for Listening Loudly:

- What is the meaning of this song to you now?
- Did your participation in Listening Loudly and Seeing Clearly change the way you think about this song?
- How will Listening Loudly, Seeing Clearly and listening to this song change the way you interact with others in your daily life? In your classroom, in particular?



**DAYS 14 THROUGH 20:**  
Acting Through Collective Genius

## FINDING A DREAM TEAM

### Objective:

Students will identify role models who exemplify sharing your Genius.

### Background:

Each of us possesses the ability to achieve greatness in our lives. Each of us can learn a lot from individuals who have distinguished themselves by accomplishing something great and extraordinary, just as we discussed a few weeks ago in “How do Genius Leaders Work.”

There are so many people who have inspired me — people I consider in many ways to be special, intelligent, and brilliant. These extraordinary people have taught me by example in the ways they learn and lead.

Here’s the amazing thing, I have never even met most of these people in person. I call these people my Dream Team. They are individuals I have deliberately selected to be inspired by and whose actions and behaviors I would like to reflect in terms of my own dreams and goals.

I have learned that you don’t have to know people personally for them to be role models. Your Dream Team can be composed of someone famously great, like any of the people we learned about during our jigsaw activity, or of a special individual, a coach or a teacher whom you want to be more like when you grow up.

A good role model doesn’t have to be someone famous or popular at the moment. A role model can be someone in your family, school, or community; someone whose actions you respect and whose behaviors and habits inspire you. But you may wonder how to identify such an individual. Here are some things you can think about as you select someone for your role model:



- What makes this individual interesting?
- What is special about this individual?
- What characteristic does this individual possess?  
How do you know?

I have designed an activity, the Dream Team Selection Procedure, that will help you identify one or more real-life mentors whom you may want to emulate. Write the answers, and put them away to review later.

The Dream Team Selection Procedure consists of four topics that encourage students to reflect on the qualities of individuals they consider for role models. For example, the third topic asks them to identify one trait that stands out for the selected individual.

Here it is important for students to understand that, for example, Michael Jordan did not win games because he was a great basketball player; he was a master of self-awareness and perseverance, which propelled his talent to a legendary level. You want students to recognize that it was Einstein's insatiable curiosity that changed the field of science. Similarly, if not for Walt Disney's audacious imagination, there would be no Disney World.

### Lesson:

Ask students to do the following:

- Create a list of five people with whom you've achieved a kind of success together, or someone who supported you in accomplishing something.
- Next to each person's name, list the qualities you value most about that person. Be specific.
- Reflect on all those qualities you've listed. Now select one key attribute that stands out above the others.

Next, select your top two choices to share with the class as the best possible candidates for the class Dream Team.

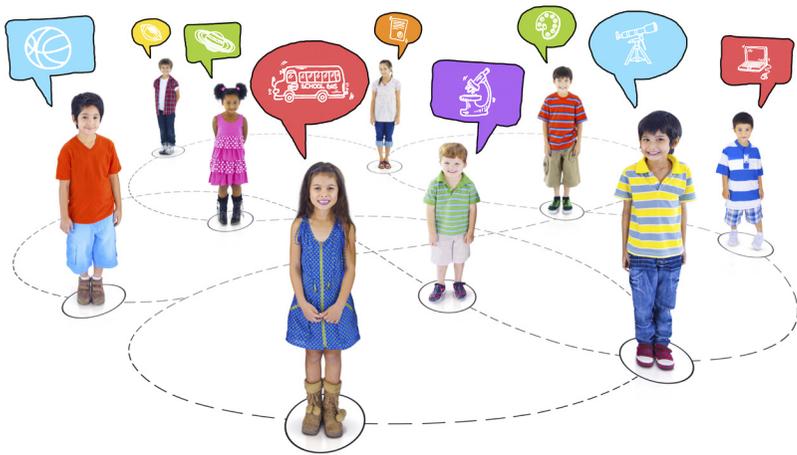
The most important thing you need to be clear about is the reason you selected these people. You should know exactly what skills, behaviors, habits, or attitudes you think make that individual extraordinary.

For example, everyone knows that Albert Einstein was extraordinary. The important question to ask and answer is, what traits did Einstein have that made him a genius?

### Discussions Questions for Finding A Dream Team:

- Explain in your words why identifying a Dream Team is important?
- Reflect on how your students created their Dream Team, what challenges did they face? What triumphs did they embrace?
- How do you think the development of this team supports your students in liberating their genius?

## WHAT MATTERS TO PEOPLE AROUND ME



### Objective:

Students will reflect on what is happening around them and learn what matters most to others.

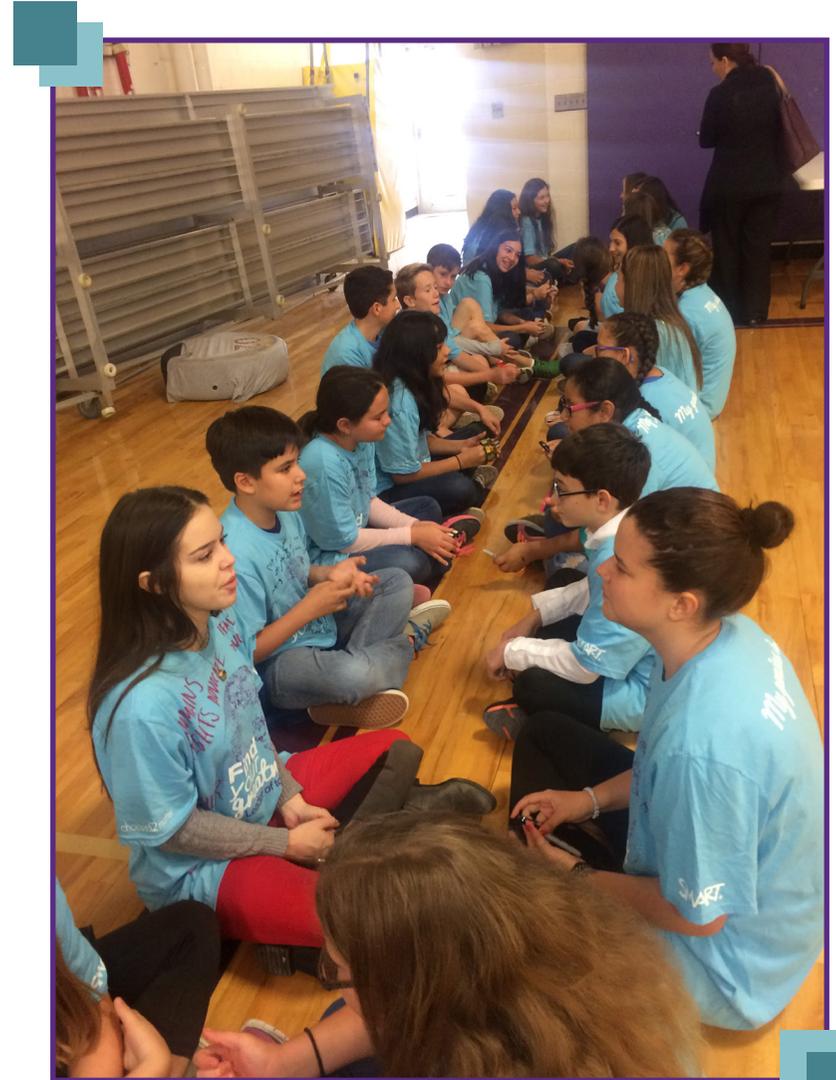
### Background:

In order for students to develop a sense of what matters most to them, and why, it helps for them to learn about what matters to others. This will also help them develop compassion and empathy, which are essential traits in a genius learner and leader.

### Materials:

*Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges, chronicles her life as a young six-year old girl who attends a desegregated school as segregationists try to block her. An amazing story told by a key figure during the civil rights movement.

*The Art Lesson* by Tomie dePaola is about art in school versus his love of art. Read about the wise teacher who helps Tomie with freedom for expression and creativity and how this helped mold one of the beloved authors and illustrators of our time.



*The Librarian of Basra: A True Story of Iraq* by Jeanette Winter — The invasion of Iraq in 2003 leaves Ali Muhammad Baker, the chief librarian of Basra’s Central Library, worried about the books in the library. She does everything in her power to save as many library books as she can!

### Lesson:

Before the lesson begins, have the children read (or read aloud) one of the above books. Then have a class discussion about the book and what mattered most to the principal character.

Next, visit the news websites — or have students do so — to find and share key, age-appropriate current events so that students to see what is going on in the world. Focus on articles in which people are trying to solve a problem in some way; even it is only by raising awareness of it or expressing their concerns about it to leaders, businesses or others.

Also have students listen to the radio, watch the news, or talk to their parents about what is going on in the news in their area.

Have students record in their Genius Notebook what they believe are the most important or interesting events, with brief summaries, and their thoughts about them.

*Class, we’ve looked at what is happening in the world around us. This could be in our neighborhood, city, state, our country and the world. I want you to take out your Genius Notebook. Read through the things we’ve been learning about. I want you to share five events with a partner and tell why these are so important – give at least one sentence. Partners should ask the following questions about the event:*

- *Why is it so important? Why did I write this down in my Genius Notebook?*
- *Who does this affect and how?*
- *What happens if no one does anything to help?*
- *How does it affect me?*
- *What have people or organization done to help this?*

Set timer for 15 minutes and walk around room, listening to students’ ideas.

*Now that you’ve had time to share and discuss, I want you to choose two that you think are the most important. Write them on a post-it and place them up here on our chart paper.*

As students are doing this, ask students to see if they can start categorizing the events that are being posted up.

*Wow! So much great thinking class! Let’s look at how we categorized these events. Why did we choose these categories? (Have discussion on a few of these)*

*Now, let’s look at the events you’ve listed. Let’s talk about the events and why you think they are so important. (Have discussion on a few of these)*

*I’m so proud of all the hard work you’ve put into this. We didn’t get through all of them, but we’ll revisit this chart. I want you to now think about the events and what others are trying to do to solve the problems that relate to them. What do you notice about the solutions? What ideas do you have that could help? (Write on board)*

*I want you to access your Genius Notebook. For one of the events you wrote on your post it, write about these two questions that I posed to you. What do you notice about the solutions? Are people even trying to help? What ideas do you have that could help? This is genius work.. This is when you need to use your brain to think of solutions as well as unique ways to help. I’ll give you 5 minutes to work on this.*

*We did a whole lot of sharing and thinking today! Thank you for your contribution. We’ll continue this conversation tomorrow.*

### Discussion Questions for What Matters to the People Around Me:

- Why do you think discussing what matters to others is important?
- How do these books and stories support discussions about what matters to the characters? What personal stories or additional resources have you supplemented this lesson with?
- What were some surprising responses or conversations that surfaced during this lesson? What prompted them to develop?

## MANY KINDS OF COURAGE

### Objective:

The student will explore and appreciate the many kinds of courage and to develop an understanding that ordinary people can experience courage in many unique ways.

*"By acting, we make things concrete; action breeds motivation, not the other way around."*

~ **Todd Henry**, Author, *The Accidental Creative*

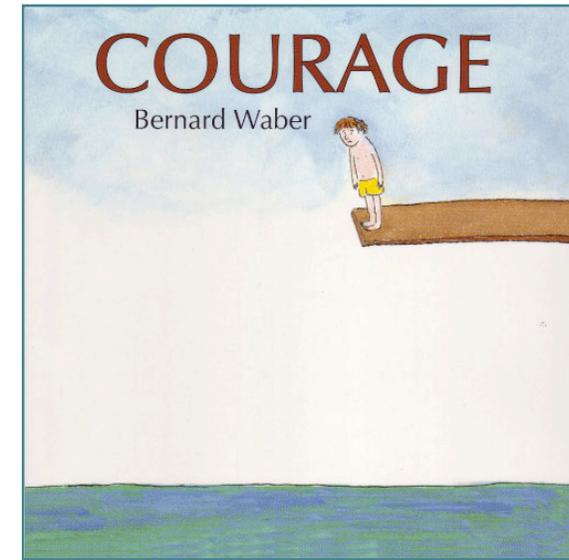
### Background:

Being brave is hard work. You can be brave, or you can be comfortable, but you can't be both. You have to choose. There are so many images of what brave looks like in real life and learning.

- Is it running into a burning building?
- Is it speaking up when someone else needs you to?
- Is it saving a hurt animal?
- Is it trying to defy the impossible?

In his fantastic book, *Courage*, Bernard Waber explores the many varied kinds of courage and celebrates the moments, big and small, that bring out the hero in each of us.

I use this book to launch a deep conversation about what courage is and what it is not.



Here is the publisher's note:

*What is courage? Certainly it takes courage for a firefighter to rescue someone trapped in a burning building, but there are many other kinds of courage too. Everyday kinds that normal, ordinary people exhibit all the time, like "being the first to make up after an argument," or "going to bed without a nightlight." Bernard Waber explores the many varied kinds of courage and celebrates the moments, big and small, that bring out the hero in each of us.*

Ask students work in groups and discuss the following question:  
What is courage?

Invite students to come up with their own definition of courage and share that definition "courageously" with their classmates.

Students can use any medium or mode to communicate their understanding of the concept: Writing, drawing, acting out, video clips, etc.

Compare and contrast the examples presented in the book with the examples students shared with one another.

- How do you think Bernard Waber is defining courage?
- How is this alike/different than how we see the word?

### Quotation Cards

Share with students the following quotation cards; each with a different quote about how courage is defined in the world.

Have them regroup and compare/contrast these definitions of courage with those previously discussed including their own.

<p>“It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.” □ J.K. Rowling, <i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone</i></p>	<p>“Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can’t practice any other virtue consistently.” □ Maya Angelou</p>
<p>“It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.” □ E.E. Cummings</p>	<p>“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear - not absence of fear.” □ Mark Twain</p>
<p>“Believe you can and you’re half-way there.” □ Theodore Roosevelt</p>	<p>“Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I’ll try again tomorrow.” □ Mary Anne Radmacher</p>

As a class, synthesize the conversation by coming up with an agreed upon and working definition of the word courage.

As both a reflection and reminder, you can distribute the following graphic organizer or have students reflect in a journal on the many kinds of courage they explored today and will see in the world.

### Many Kinds of Courage

My Reflection by \_\_\_\_\_

*“There are many kinds of courage.  
Awesome kinds.  
And everyday kinds.  
Still, courage is courage –  
Whatever kind.”*

What is your best example of courage?  
Describe it in a sentence.

Courage is:

Explain why this is an example of courage is important you.

Set a courage goal:

Describe what you are going to do to act and be braver than you are and as brave as you can be here:

### Discussion Questions for Many Kinds of Courage:

- Why do you think being brave is an important step for liberating your genius?
- Share your class’ working definition of the word, **courage**? Describe in your own words, how did you come up with this definition?

## HOW TO COLLABORATE EFFECTIVELY

---

### Objective:

Students will understand that we are smarter together; that their contribution is expected and needed and will learn to value and honor the contribution of others.

### Background:

“Collaboration” has become a buzzword that we attach to any process that involves people working together. This is because we often use collaboration as a synonym for other buzzwords that start with C: Cooperation, Communication and Coordination.

In doing so, we miss the most critical element – **value creation**.

Collaboration describes a process of value creation that our traditional structures of communication and teamwork can't achieve.

Let's break it down further and clarify what it really is.

### Collaboration has three parts: Team, Process, and Purpose

1. Two or more people (Team)
2. Working together (Process)
3. Towards shared goals (Purpose)

A group of people using social software together doesn't, by itself, translate into collaboration.

Technology certainly raises the bar of what is possible, but merely using them does not create value.

We say that because I see schools and organizations struggling to fit social technologies into their culture. Widespread platform or tool adoption is not enough. There needs to be a unified plan, an understanding of what these tools can and can't do, and more importantly how people are going to work together.



Great tools available can facilitate such collaboration, but even the best tools cannot guarantee that success.

### Collaboration:

- Must be embedded in the culture, where a standard and expectation ethic of contribution flourishes.
- People in the classroom or community must recognize they are smarter together.
- People must work “out loud” – sharing is constant.
- People collectively solve problems.
- Together, everyone discovers more innovative ways to be successful.

Now this sounds high-tech, but it happens elegantly every day in kindergarten classrooms, where we call it “Show and Tell.”

We learned how to collaborate in the sandbox with friend and strangers alike – now we get to expand the size of the sandbox and extend the invitation for creation to anyone, living anyplace, anytime, anywhere.

This is where and how disruption happens – when you invite people into the room and assure them that their contribution will be honored, they choose to contribute. They choose collaboration.

Tap into a crowd if you believe the most valuable person is the crowd. You must innately believe that smartest person in the room is the room – and that the more diverse room, the smarter it gets.

Collaboration requires unrelenting determination and commitment from those who now understand that the desired result can only be achieved together.

People at any level can make an impact, be a leader, break a barrier. No only can they; they must.

We are smarter together.

Further reading: “The Smartest Person in the Room is the Room.”

(<http://www.angelamaiers.com/2013/02/the-smartest-person-in-the-room-is-the-room-so-whos-on-your-invite-list>)

### Lesson:

#### Playground talk

Discuss how people collaborate on the playground or in the sandbox.

- For younger students, ask how it currently happens
- For older students, ask how it did happen

Ask students, “When you are on the swings and they are all taken, how do you know who gets to use them?” This should prompt a discussion of issues of fairness, informal cooperation, and inclusiveness

*What are the rules for tag? Who decided this? What if you disagree about whether someone is out or not? Again, this should result in a discussion about Rules; fairness; cooperation*

*When you head out to the playground, how do you decide where you are going to play? This may prompt a discussion about individual talents and preferences.*

Reveal to students how all their responses show that they already have an important skill needed to be successful as students and as adults: collaboration

“When you have a tough problem in front of you, remember the playground”

Once the activity is over, have older students read “The Sandbox Manifesto,” younger students can watch the video embedded in it. Ask students if they agree with the points raised in this article or video.

(<http://www.angelamaiers.com/2014/10/the-sandbox-manifesto>)

## Active Collaboration

*Sometimes in school, the work you do is on your own. However, the work of geniuses is often working with others. Doing genius work means doing big, challenging things, and that requires that we put our brains together. It requires that we collaborate. (Define “collaborate” for students in younger grades.)*

*Do you want to know a fun secret? Collaborating and working together is something that many adults have trouble with. They try to do things on their own, and they aren't able to accomplish as much. However, from what I heard from our discussion of the playground, it's obvious that you all have a lot of experience collaborating.*

*Let's do a quick example to put this into action.*

Put students into small groups of about 4-5. Each group should have access to this Arranging Sentences Activity:

Arrange these sentences into a paragraph that makes sense to your group.

- The traveler went to another worker and asked again, “What are you doing?”
- It's about the mission everyone shares.
- The third worker responded, “Can't you see, we're building a cathedral.”
- He asked the first person he saw, “I'm not from this village. What is everyone doing?”
- With this, the traveler learned that the work you do is about more than just one task.
- The worker replied, “Can't you see, I'm earning money to support my family.”
- A traveler came to a village and saw many people working.
- The person replied, “Can't you see, I'm cutting stone into large blocks.”
- Not satisfied, the traveler went on to a third worker and asked yet again, “What are you doing?”

## Original paragraph

A traveler came to a village and saw many people working. He asked the first person he saw, “I'm not from this village. What is everyone doing?” The person replied, “Can't you see, I'm cutting stone into large blocks.” The traveler went to the next worker and asked again, “What are you doing?” The worker replied, “Can't you see, I'm earning money to support my family.” Not satisfied, the traveler went on to a third worker and asked yet again, “What are you doing?” The third worker responded, “Can't you see, we're building a cathedral.” With this, the traveler learned that the work you do is about more than just one task. It's about the mission everyone shares.

Have groups complete the activity, which should only take a few minutes. When they are done, talk to them about how they completed the activity:.

- *What did your group do to get the task done?*
- *What steps did you take?*
- *Did people take on roles or assign roles?*
- *Were there disagreements? How did you handle them?*
- *What connections can you make between this activity and how you collaborate on the playground?*

Encourage dialogue about the collaboration process. Get students to reflect on their recent actions.

## Connecting school to the world

Tell students that throughout their lives they will be called on to contribute their genius to solve big problems. However, solving them isn't as easy as arranging sentences, e.g. to getting food to people to eat, you need farmers, truck drivers, grocers, chefs, safety inspectors, etc. They all collaborate, and they all contribute their genius.

### Have students identify a general problem to be solved:

- It can be small, like a broken drinking fountain in their school
- It can be big, like people not having a place to sleep

### Have students identify how their geniuses could contribute.

### Have students identify what contributions from others they would need.

### Discussions Questions for How to Collaborate Effectively:

- What does collaboration look and feel like in your classroom?
- Describe how your students experience the process of value **creation**?
- How would you explain how disruption happens? What does it do to your collaborative groups?
- How does this lesson incorporate or draw on previous lessons?
- Compare and contrast the work that you do as an individual versus the work you accomplish with others?
- What were some big takeaways that your students experienced after piecing together the sentences to create a logical paragraph?
- When identifying a general problem to be solved, how did you encourage students to collaborate, contribute and leverage their genius?

## FINDING MENTORS AND COLLABORATORS

Many scholars of the past burrowed into library stacks, read the printed literature on a topic, consulted with a mentor, and emerged with their research.

Today, the smartest person in the room is the room.

While there are many instances of scholarly collaboration throughout history, none rise to the level of what's possible today, where dozens or scores or hundreds of people from around the world can connect simultaneously and in real-time.

NYU Professor Clay Shirky says that most people "over estimate the value of access to information and underestimate the value of access to each other."

While this may be true of most adults, students already understand the power and value of connecting to others, and they are exceedingly comfortable doing it digitally.

Students dominate popular Q&A sites such as Yahoo! Answers, Answers.com and Quizlet. However, these sites are not authoritative, rarely provide links to references, and should not be cited as a source for a student paper.

Fortunately, students can explore many free avenues online to connect with experts in almost any field of study or area of interest. All they need is for adults to open the door and point them in the right direction.

We've seen over and over and over again that when students show they are fiercely determined to do something great, adults everywhere want to guide them to make it happen.

### What Could Go Wrong?

- When students interact with adults online, there is always the possibility of inappropriate interaction.
- The role of adults is to teach students to navigate online safely, and these sites provide excellent learning opportunities not found anywhere else.

- All of these resources are moderated to some degree, so when using them, students should be mindful, not afraid.
- Just as when a teen ventures into the big city for the first time without adult supervision, they need to be aware of their surroundings and take precautions.
- Always have an open line of communication with your students concerning their online research.

Here are examples of places where students can ask questions of research or subject matter experts online, and possibly find a mentor or collaborator.

### Ask a Librarian

Many local, county and college libraries offer a virtual “Ask a Librarian” service through which a student can ask a trained librarian for reference help. Many libraries work through a network of libraries to provide 24/7 coverage around the world. When a student needs to find a great resource but can’t arrange a face-to-face visit with a reference librarian, Ask a Librarian services fill the gap.

### Quora

Quora is a Question and Answer site that is comprised mostly of professionals. Unlike other Q&A sites, most users register with their real name and provide their credentials, and most answers are at least somewhat useful.

We recently created this Choose2Matter page on Quora; when a student asks a question about social entrepreneurship, we’ll find an expert to answer it. <https://www.quora.com/topic/Choose2Matter>

### Twitter

With hundreds of millions of users, Twitter can be an excellent resource for students to find that handful of people who can provide them insight.

Students need to learn to use “hashtags” to target their Tweets to people likely to have knowledge about the subject of their question.

When Maggie Moran, a sophomore education major, wanted to find an expert to discuss tutoring a student with interrupted formal education (SIFE), she turned to Twitter, using the #SIFE hashtag. She reports that, “within minutes of my tweet, I received five replies with suggestions on books to read, methods to try, and educators to follow who were experts in the area.”

### Video Conferencing

Services such as Skype and Zoom make it feasible for anyone with an Internet connection to video conference, free of charge, with anyone else, anywhere in the world, who also has an Internet connection. Skype in the Classroom offers premium tools free of charge to educators, including a service to connect with guest authors, expert teachers, and others.

### Lesson:

Ask students to reflect on Clay Shirky’s statement that most people “over estimate the value of access to information and underestimate the value of access to each other.” Ask them what this means to them.

Then, discuss each of the above services with students and ask for what purpose, and when, they might use each one.

Depending on the age and sophistication of your students, either create a classroom account or have students create individual accounts for each of the services (or divide the services up among the students, so that each one is used by 1/5 of your class).

Then submit several questions or inquiries or offers to connect and collaborate to each of the above services and wait several days for responses to flow in.

Then, meet with your class to discuss the responses.

When this exercise is done, ask them once again to reflect on Clay Shirky’s statement at the top of this lesson. Have their views of the relative value of access to information and to other people

## Discussions Questions for Mentors and Collaborators:

- Reflect on Clay Shirky's quote about over estimating the value of access to information. Why is this important to consider and discuss? What emerged in your conversation with your students when asking what this meant to them?
- How will your students find these digital platforms useful when asking research questions to mentors and collaborators online?
- Have their views of the relative value of access to information and other people changed? Why or why not?

## SHARING OUR GENIUS WITH THE WORLD



### Objective:

Students will understand the importance of sharing their Genius with the world outside of their classroom, and will learn tools that will enable them to do so.

### Background:

Show students that you take their ideas seriously and believe there is a global audience for those ideas. In time, students will believe the same. If students have an idea, however big or small or crazy or epic or outlandish, we ask that they write it down, pursue it and most importantly, share it with others.

Sharing your idea and asking for help can change everything. We practiced sharing our needs and gives and used every new and emerging technology to ensure this happened.

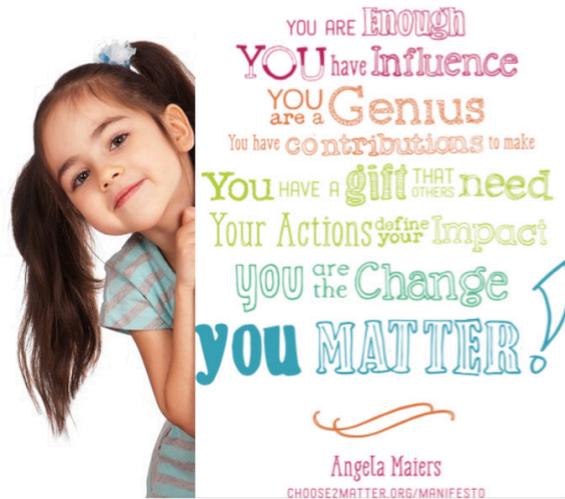
Additional reading: Juliet Revell, Book Creator Brings Out the Genius in Our Classroom:

(<http://www.redjumper.net/blog/2014/04/book-creator-brings-genius-classroom/>)

## Lesson:

The “You Matter Manifesto” begins by telling the reader “You are enough.” It is a clarion call to everyone to step up and into their genius and contribute it to the world.

(<http://www.choose2matter.org/manifesto/>)



Display on a digital screen that the whole class can see, or print out copies of it. Have students take turns, one at a time, reading one tenet of the Manifesto, and additional material, to the class. Then discuss each tenet of the Manifesto, one by one. For each one, ask students what the words mean to them.

Next, to bring in a real-life example of finding the courage to share your genius with the world, have the students read “Writing that is WOW - Worthy of the World” - or if you’re short on time, just play the video embedded in the lesson.

(<http://www.angelamaiers.com/2015/03/writing-that-is-wow-worthy-of-the-world/>)

Again, ask students to share their takeaways from watching this video.

Next, assign students to write their reflections in their Genius Notebooks, and to then share this content with the world.

Don’t limit students to the written word; student “output” may be a video documentary, a podcast, a traditional paper, a series of photographs, a work of art, or an oral presentation.

Students can import content from their Genius Notebook to the web and build beautiful, interactive presentations for each project.

Here are just a few of the platforms that students can use:

- Yoursphere is a student-friendly sharing space. Educators can create their own classroom, post prompts and have students respond right on the class page. Other approved classrooms on Yoursphere can view the page.
- Padlet enables each student can share their reflections on an electronic sticky note.
- Kidblog offers class blogs or individual student accounts.

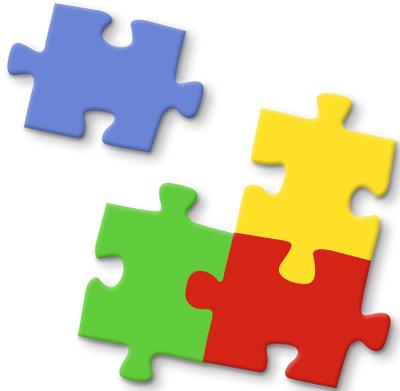
Some students may embark on a project that will take the full school year – and perhaps the next one as well. Others may work on a series of short projects. They can save and publish their presentations.

## Discussion Questions for Sharing Our Genius with the World:

- Why have students share their genius with the world?
- How did students respond to the real-life example of finding the courage to share their genius with the world? What were their takeaways?
- What tools or platforms did your students use to project their genius? How did these tools enhance their proclamation?

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

---



### Objective:

We take a quick look back at the previous 19 days of genius work to help the students reflect on how they've grown as learners and leaders.

### Background:

You and your students have put an enormous amount of time, energy, and heart and soul into the work over the past four weeks.

This will all be worth it, because Genius Matters is an apprenticeship to citizenship,

- Yes, students are now ready to work on a project.
- Yes they will learn how to better leverage technology.
- Yes, they will apply concepts used in math and science and reading.
- Yes, at the end, or some interim stopping point, many of the students will deliver some form of presentation that will exceed the great expectations that you or their parents had for them.

This all matters, but we can't miss the bigger picture.

### Lesson:

Ask your students to take 15 minutes to read through their Genius Notebook, starting with Day 1.

Next, if at all possible, gather your students in a tight group. This is a celebration - we don't want them sitting in symmetrical rows with their feet planted on the floor in front of them. We want them to be able to feel and feed off the collective energy in the room. If your classroom is not suitable for this, consider whether there is an alternative space that would work.

Also, consider joining together with other classrooms that may have gone through Genius Hour at the same time. Don't limit yourself to the same grade! Sixth graders LOVE to hear second graders share their reflections on material that they have all been study, and vice-versa.

In the event that students start repeating each other, or focusing on the same narrow slices of the lessons, be ready to prompt them to discuss areas they've been ignoring.

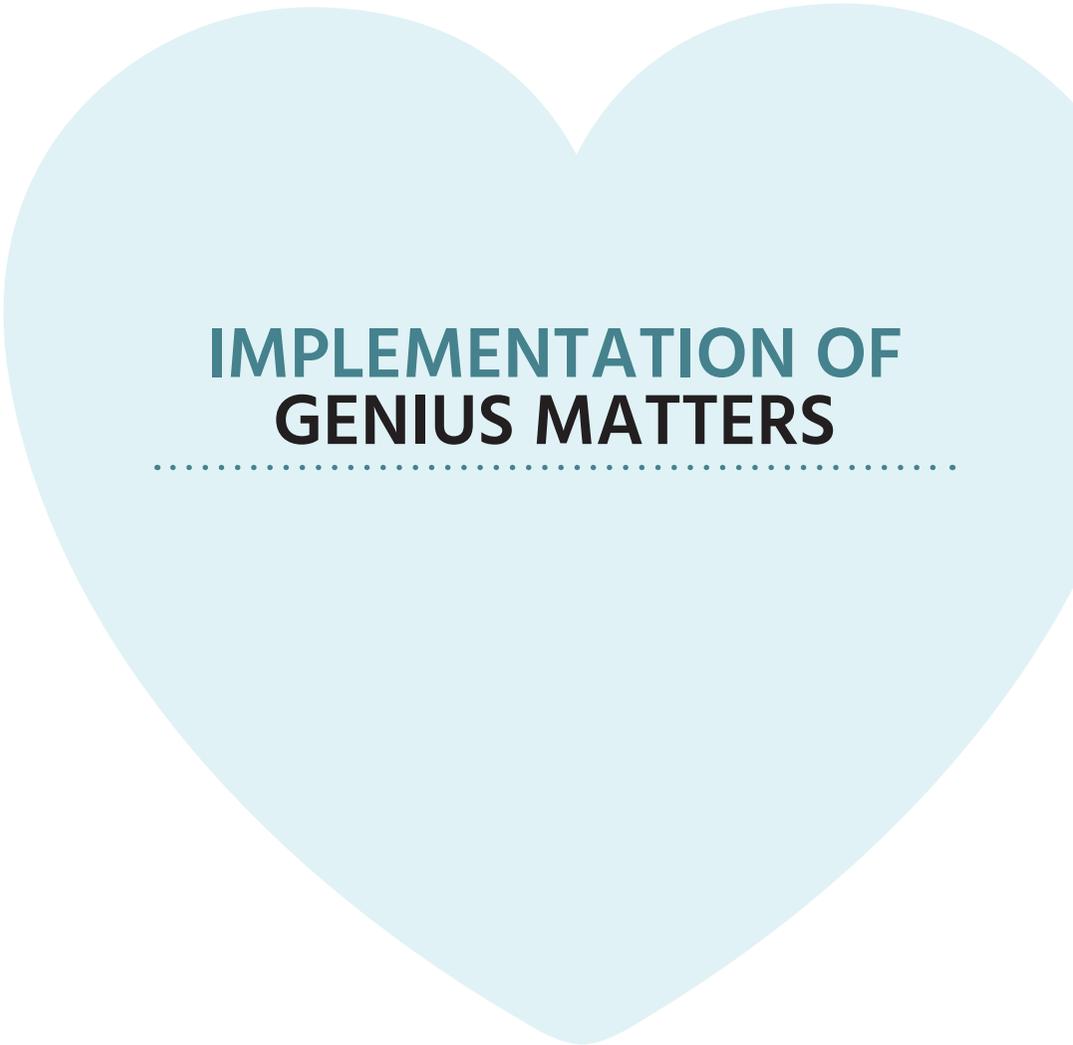
Use prompts such as these:

- What has your Genius Notebook come to mean to you? Do you think you may want to keep it for many years, to see how you grow as a learner?
- How have you changed the way you work as a result of this learning?
- How has this course changed the way you view yourself and your place in the world?
- How have you changed what you aspire to be?
- Have you changed the way you view genius? What did you learn about the way that geniuses learn and work? Do you think you can emulate them?
- What was the most interesting thing that you've learned about yourself by using Thrively?
- Did you learn anything that surprised you about your classmates, your parents, or other people in the world?

- Have you changed the way you view courage? Has this made you more courageous?
- Do you believe that your work is worthy of the world, and that you have an obligation to share your work with others?
- Do you now believe this statement: “You are a genius, and the world needs your contribution?”

### Discussions Questions for Putting It All Together:

- What does the phrase mean to you: Genius Hour is an apprenticeship to citizenship?
- How did you celebrate your students’ accomplishments? What did you do to avoid narrowing in on specific lessons and instead focus on the bigger picture?
- How did the prompts and questions in this section help support your students overall reflection of their experience?
- What were some of the feelings and emotions that you and your class felt while reflecting on the Genius Hour journey?
- Looking back as an educator, was there anything you would have done differently? If so, what? What went well? What were some of your biggest hurdles? Why?
- Will you do Genius Hour again with another class? Why or why not?



## IMPLEMENTATION OF GENIUS MATTERS

---

# YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE: THE #GENIUSHOUR COMMUNITY

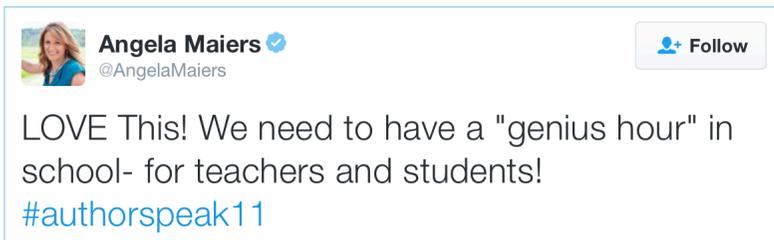
---

## Objective:

The decision to introduce Genius Hour into your classroom is a big step. You will not walk this way alone. You will be part of a community of tens of thousands of other Genius Hour teachers. They generously share their experiences, so that you can mimic their successes and learn more their mistakes.

The idea to bring Genius Hour into school crystallized for me in 2010 when Amy Sandvold and I were writing *The Passion-Driven Classroom*, a book that bridges the passion gap in school. In our book, we wrote of students working on passion projects. The following year, Daniel Pink was one of the first to coin the term "Genius Hour" in his book "Drive." He discussed its implementation within several companies in a 2011 blog post.

After watching a talk by Daniel Pink in November 2011, I sent this Tweet:



Four months after I sent my first Tweet about Genius Hour, a group of teachers started a Genius Hour Twitter chat to exchange ideas and experiences.

A year later, four of them published "The Genius Hour Manifesto."



**Hugh McDonald** wrote, *“This was something special that engaged learners like nothing I had seen before. The learning atmosphere felt amazing. I could walk down the hall ... and return to see them all still on task, questioning, driving their own learning and having fun being curious.”*

(<https://hughtheteacher.wordpress.com/category/genius-hour/>)

**Gallit Zvi** echoed some of the same themes: *“Student engagement is at its highest. Some students are huddled around a laptop doing research on countries, others are creating websites or presentations, and some are filming movies. Some are building and creating things with their hands. The common thread is that it is something they are passionate about and/or wonder about.”* <https://hughtheteacher.wordpress.com/category/genius-hour/>

**Denise Krebs** wrote, *“In this age where knowledge is ubiquitous and no longer belongs to the teacher to dispense during lesson plans, school needs to change. We need to inspire students to become lifelong learners. Genius hour can do that.”*

**Joy Kirr** was featured in a CNN article, which quoted one of her students who was upset that a snow day meant missing Genius Hour: *“It’s definitely the highlight of my week. It’s not a project a teacher assigned, it’s something that actually interests you, and it gets you learning in different ways from what we do the rest of the day at school.”*

**Below, we offer advice from some of our favorite educators who have successfully introduced genius hour into their classrooms.**

- Regularly check the #GeniusHour hashtag on Twitter to find great resources and advice from other educators all day, every day.
- Some of our favorite videos or Slide Decks that introduce Genius Hour:
  - **“What’s It All About,”** by AJ Jiuliani (<https://vimeo.com/66324892>)

- **“What is Genius Hour”** by ChrisKesler[MT2] ([http://www.slideshare.net/gallit\\_z/rscon4-presentation-on-genius-hour](http://www.slideshare.net/gallit_z/rscon4-presentation-on-genius-hour))

- **“Genius Hour. Creativity. Passion. Wonder.”** by Gallit Zvi ([http://www.slideshare.net/gallit\\_z/rscon4-presentation-on-genius-hour](http://www.slideshare.net/gallit_z/rscon4-presentation-on-genius-hour))

- When creating materials for students, whether for Genius Hour or otherwise - draw some inspiration from this eye-opening post[MT3] in which one of AJ Jiuliani’s students took AJ’s handout that explained Genius Hour and completely redesigned it, with student-friendly, eye-popping graphics. (<http://ajjuliani.com/genius-hour-guidelines-re-designed-by-student>)
- Denise Krebs, Gallit Zvi and Joy Kirr, three of the educators with whom I worked in the earliest days of Genius Hour, created this Genius Hour Wiki, which is also the home for the #GeniusHour Twitter chat. (<http://geniushour.wikispaces.com>)
- Joy Kirr wrote this outstanding reflection when a parent challenged the value of Genius Hour. (<http://geniushour.blogspot.com/2013/01/more-determined-than-ever.html>)
- When you want to take a deep dive into community advice, the Genius Hour Live Binder contains the contribution of almost 400 teachers. Its creator, Joy Kirr, explains:

*“The LiveBinder was created out of pain....Genius Hour had become something I MUST do with my students. I needed to defend it. I needed to find the stories that motivated others to try it. I needed to let parents know just WHY I was using this time in class on a weekly basis.... I began collecting, every day, posts and ideas that people were tweeting out about their own trials and tribulations, creativity, innovation, engagement, passion...”*

(<http://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=829279>)

Here are some more, excellent sources of inspiration on Genius Hour:

**#Edchat** and **#edtechchat** - Join the conversation on Twitter!

**Edutopia** offers comprehensive coverage on education from both staff writers and top educators: [Edutopia.org](http://Edutopia.org)

**EdSurge** is an excellent source for cutting edge developments in Ed tech: [EdSurge.com](http://EdSurge.com)

**Education Week - Technology** is the tech section of one of the education world's biggest information hubs: [edweek.org](http://edweek.org)

**TeachThought** is a "progressive learning brand dedicated to supporting educators in evolving learning for a 21st century audience," [TeachThought.com](http://TeachThought.com)



## WHY GENIUS MATTERS? HELPING YOU MAKE THE CASE

When we discuss Genius Matters with teachers who are new to it, we sometimes hear, "This would never fly in my school." But tens of thousands of educators around the world have made the case for launching it in their classrooms.

Indeed, when we participated in a breakout on, the conversation pro-ceeded in a lively manner (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVrIcAtfSYs>) until someone acknowledged the 800-pound gorilla in the room:

"How can we make time for Genius Matters if we are so relentlessly focused on improving student test scores?"

The initial answers were disheartening.

Three different leaders — superintendents and principals — had a pat answer to this question: we simply wait until after testing is over, near the end of the school year, to make time for students to discover and explore their passion.

Encouragingly, the rest of the speakers emphatically made the case that if you want to raise test scores, you have to see Genius Matters as our promise to students that their passions matter.

Most schools intuitively know the impact of a student's state of mind on their test performance. However, their efforts at preparing students socially and emotionally for testing is too often limited to a "pep ral-ly" the day before testing begins.

Conversely, Genius Matters offers months of foundational lessons because the process of fostering confident, creative, self-aware citi-zens requires a "building block" process and ample periods of sharing and reflection. It cannot be rushed, and certainly not compressed into a two-hour rally.

Tens of thousands of educators around the world have made the case for launching it in their classrooms. Here are recommended strategies:

- **Go in with a Plan** - Use the preparation mentioned above to prove this is a carefully thought out approach to learning. Showing how learning objectives and standards will be met.
- **Show Examples** - There are thousands of teachers in class rooms around the world doing Genius Hour successfully. Find great examples by searching #GeniusHour on Twitter and by checking out The Global Genius Hour wiki and the Genius Hour LiveBinder.  
(<http://theglobalgeniushourproject.wikispaces.com>)  
(<http://www.livebinders.com/play/play/829279>)
- **Connect to the Mission** - Every educator wants to prepare his or her students for future success. Genius Hour is one of the most powerful tools to achieve this, but you may have to make this mission-driven connection clear.
- **Share research** - AJ Juliani offers “The Research Behind 20% Time” a fantastic list of research supporting the benefits of Genius Hour. His post also includes helpful books, links to other teachers’ Genius Hour work, and connections to Common Core State Standards.  
(<http://ajjuliani.com/research/>)
- Listen to this short BAM! Radio segment on *Three Ways to Get Your School Administrator’s Support for Genius Hour*.

(<http://www.bamradionetwork.com/innovated/1796-three-ways-to-get-your-school-administrators-support-for-genius-hour>)

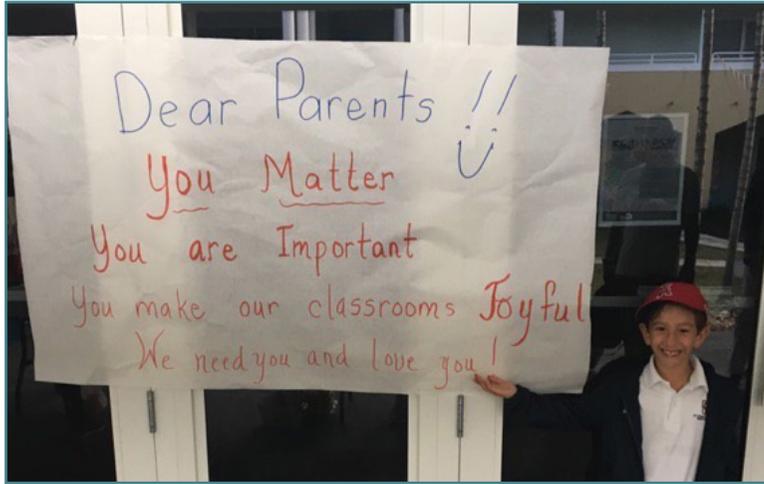
## COMMUNICATIONS WITH PARENTS



Once you’ve convinced your administration, the next step may be “selling” it to your students’ parents. Because of a spate of attention recently to Genius Hour and individualized learning, this may be easier than it would have been five years ago. Here are some of the better letters we’ve found for introducing parents to genius hour. Bear in mind that none of these teachers had the benefit of this guide; you’ll have to customize your letter somewhat to mention the “First 20 Days” approach.

**Kevin Brookhouser** - “A letter to my students and parents about the 20% Project”  
(<http://www.iteachithink.com/2012/08/a-letter-to-my-students-and-parents.html>)

Kevin’s letter to the students and parents of his 10th grade English class walks through each element of their 20% time process. The letter is neatly divided into sections, and it includes helpful videos and links to explain the ideas behind the class’s undertaking – particularly his ideas around failure.



### Nicole Hill - "Genius Hour Project" Letter

Nicole's letter is similar to Kevin's in that she nods to Dan Pink's *Drive*, Google employees' use of 20% time, and the importance of failure. She clearly outlines that goals for her high school communications class, including its "product focus" – making sure students complete the year with a tangible end product. It includes a structured timeline and assessment.

(<http://www.dasd.k12.pa.us/cms/lib3/PA01000215/Centricity/Domain/221/Letter%20to%20parents%20and%20students.pdf>)

Mrs. Helwick and Mrs. Withrow, two Language Arts teachers - this letter is similar to the others, but provides some excellent language to cover the point that Genius Hour is about the process, more than the final product.

(<http://www.sequimschools.wednet.edu/cms/lib6/WA01000561/Centricity/Domain/319/example%20letter%20to%20parents.pdf>)

Genius Hour Starter is a free, digital download that includes a parent letter, as well as advice on approaching administrators.

(<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Genius-Hour-Starter-1002142>)

## LAUNCHING AND SUSTAINING GENIUS HOUR



As we explained at the outset, our lessons cover the first 20 days, and are aimed at setting the conditions for a successful launch of Genius Hour.

What do you do on Day 21? Here are answers from some of the better educators we know:

- **Paul Solarz**, a fifth grade teacher in Illinois, offers these step-by-step instructions for creating passion projects, as well as this document with additional resources and some of his students' completed work.

(<http://psolarz.weebly.com/mr-solarz-eportfolio/step-by-step-directions-for-creating-passion-projects-in-our-classroom>)

(<http://psolarz.weebly.com/2013-2014-passion-projects.html>)

## HOW DO I GRADE GENIUS HOUR

- **Joy Kirr**, a seventh grade language arts teacher, offers this collection of resources, including her week-by-week guide.

(<http://scholarsrm239.weebly.com/what-is-genius-hour.html>)  
([https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VnV5soA1r00xiRtH88IR9\\_YZSbky4sRjYRl3bIhBF98/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VnV5soA1r00xiRtH88IR9_YZSbky4sRjYRl3bIhBF98/edit))

- **Jennifer Ward**, a high school teacher in Pennsylvania, implemented this #HavPassionProject with her students, with remark-able results.

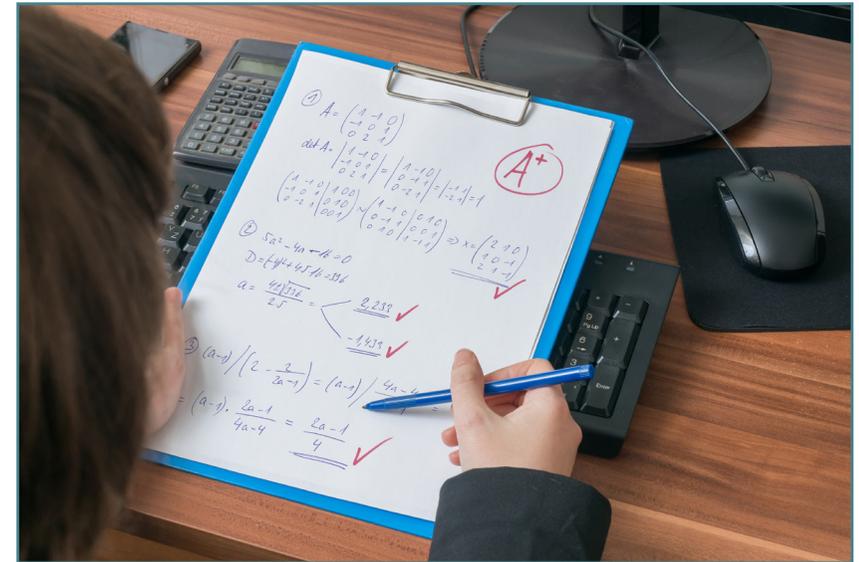
(<http://www.jenniferward.org/2015/01/anything-really-really.html>)

- At the 2015 ISTE Conference, **Gallit Zvi** conducted a stellar presentation on Genius Hour. Here is a document that collects all of the resources and slides that she shared. Denise Krebs created a similar presentation that you can find here.

(<https://docs.google.com/document/d/12UBrUrpRLbikIIYp-Q74MxztZkcllFcgZMbgLbgmFY/edit>)  
([https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1nCtJKQP0I-FX51HAekGom-MY8FJ7iq5Wuf\\_td-flSm8/edit#slide=id.p](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1nCtJKQP0I-FX51HAekGom-MY8FJ7iq5Wuf_td-flSm8/edit#slide=id.p))

- For advice on dealing with students who are so fixated on the “game of school” that they struggle to participate in exploring their passion, read “What to Do When Genius Hour Fails” by **A.J. Juiliani**.

(<http://ajjuliani.com/genius-hour-fails/>)



Hopefully you have found a few common themes throughout this guide:

- Genius Matters is about the process, not the final product.
- All students are unique individuals with the capability to do genius work.
- Every student has particular strengths and passions waiting to be leveraged and explored.
- Collaboration is so much better than competition in preparing students for the modern world and workforce.

With these themes in mind, where do you think we come down on the question of whether or not to “grade” student’s participation in genius hour?

Assess the effort, the dedication and diligence, the willingness to participate fully in the lessons and embrace the ideals we've set forth.

But please do not make genius hour the equivalent of the science fair, with a strict rubric and points taken off for failing to precisely complete the rubric, sharp deadlines and cutthroat competition. Most of us know that this leads invariably to procrastination, parents spending money on materials, yelling, and finishing the project while the student cries himself or herself to sleep after midnight.

Not exactly a formula for liberating anything, is it?

If you set the proper tone from Day 1, and the students learn that their effort and output will be shared with the world, and not just with their teacher, then genius will show up.

## STUDENT SHARING



As teachers, we learn to think in terms of assessment and the end game: the quiz at the end of the week, the final exam at the end of the year, the report card that arrives in the summer mail.

As I also discuss in the section on grading, in my opinion, the process is more important than the output, and assessment should measure effort and diligence more than the final product.

If the process works as it should, then student "output" may be a video documentary, a podcast, a traditional paper, a series of photographs, a work of art, or an oral presentation. Or something our imagination can't even conjure up. Some students may decide to embark on a project that will take the full-school year - and perhaps the next one as well. Others may work on a long series of short projects.

Also, some ambitious teachers encourage their students to present their own TED-style talks - and perhaps their very own actual TED Talks.

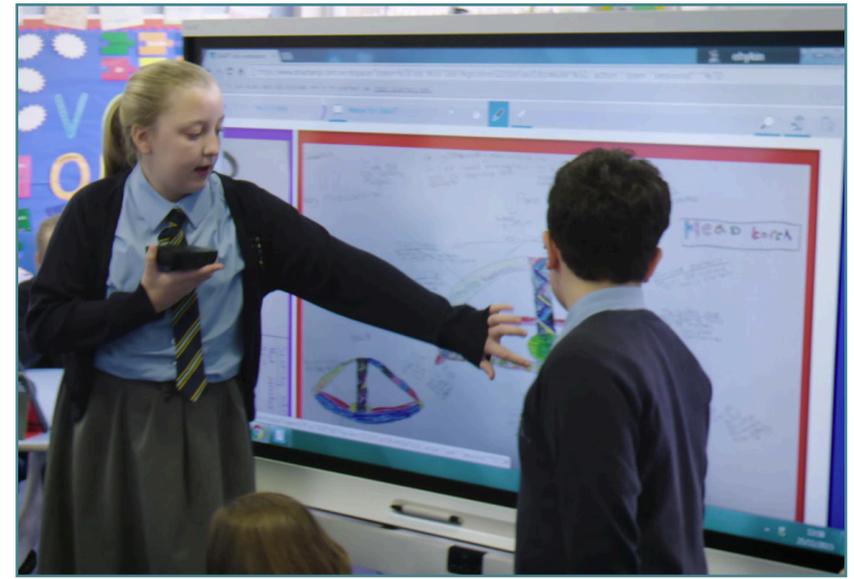
#### For support on this:

- Visit Ted-Ed Clubs  
(<http://ed.ted.com/clubs>)
- Read “What Students Can Learn From Giving Ted Talks”  
(<http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2014/11/25/what-students-can-learn-from-giving-tedx-talks/>)
- Visit “The TEDxClassroomProject”  
(<https://tedxproject.wordpress.com>)

#### Discussion Questions:

- Why have students share their genius with the world?
- How did students respond to the real-life example of finding the courage to share their genius with the world? What were their takeaways?
- What tools or platforms did your students use to project their genius? How did these tools enhance their proclamation?

## SMART Technologies: Connecting Genius Through Technology



Imagine a platform that will help your students connect, collaborate and reach other individuals from around the world, collectively working on the same heartbeat?

SMART software facilitates connections that matter! You can virtually connect your students on similar ideas and problems in a digital shareable workspace.

Students today are our future and they live in a global society with issues that impact us all. Global connections are instrumental in flattening our world and building successful solutions that matter. SMART amp provides a platform for students to collaborate and discuss the importance of their projects, along with how they make a difference.

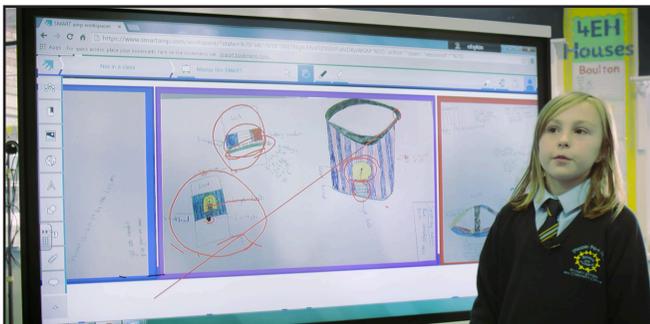
## What is SMART amp?

It is a shareable workspace that can be shared within one classroom or across domains. The workspaces can be teacher-designed and very structured or just contain basic descriptors of the work required of the teacher, based on the instructor's lesson design, allowing students to create their own workspace to fit their thinking. Students are able to work as a group within the space to create content, add multimedia content of their own or from the web and use real-time instant messaging to communicate with group members and teacher(s) to take full advantage of the collaborative nature of this tool. Any students who might not yet be willing to stand up and speak in front of the class (ELL or Spec Ed) have time to cultivate their thoughts and opinions and be equal contributors and strong group members.

SMART amp is web-based, so it is device agnostic and merges with users' Google accounts for cloud storage. All contributions are tracked so educators have insight into who is contributing what and have a better understanding of each students' learning. SMART amp supports Project-based learning, Student-led learning, Personalized learning, and Inquiry-based learning.

Mattering within the four walls of your classroom is the first step; however, teachers can foster that with many different tools, including SMART amp. Once you are able to leave those four walls and work outside of your comfort-zone, the opportunities for mattering grow exponentially. Now students can amplify their genius!

Try SMART amp for 60 days for free - ([smartamp.com/trial](http://smartamp.com/trial))



## ADDITIONAL READING



- *Passion Driven Classroom* by Angela Maiers and Amy Sandoval
- *Classroom Habitudes* by Angela Maiers
- *Drive* by Daniel H. Pink
- *The Genius Hour Guidebook*, by Denise Krebs and Gallit Zvi
- *Inquiry and Innovation: Using 20% Time, Genius Hour, and PBL to Drive Student Success* by A.J. Juliani
- *Finding Your Element* by Ken Robinson
- *Mentoring Student Passions Through Inquiry-Driven Research* - Christina Brennan
- *The 20Time Project: How educators can launch Google's formula for future-ready innovation* by Kevin Brookhouser

## THE NEXT LEVEL: CHOOSE2MATTER

choose  matter



Six months after we published “The Passion Driven Classroom,” I delivered this talk at TEDxDesMoines, titled “You Matter,” in which I discussed something I had notice in my earliest days in the classroom:

*The most dangerous thing for any human being is to believe they don't matter.*

I spoke of how two words - You Matter - can change lives and change our world, if we understand them and we leverage them in the right way.

(<https://vimeo.com/103280107>)

People reacted powerfully to this call to action, undertaking awe-inspiring quests to address problems in our world.

Choose2Matter is a universal movement that was created in response to this breathtaking reaction.

Choose2Matter is the intersection of You Matter and Genius Hour.

It begins with a question that helps students explore their passions: “What matters most to you, and why?”

We then take it an evolution further, by asking: “What breaks your heart about that?” and “What are we going to do about it?”

Students have moved beyond learning, to take action that has an impact on the world.

In Spring 2017, there will be an online professional development course about Choose2Matter (it comes with student materials and a classroom implementation package). It will greatly enhance your ability to notice, value and honor your students. It will change, for good, the way you view your students and their place in this world. Most importantly, it will fundamentally change the way you view yourself as an educator, colleague, loved one, and citizen.

To learn more, visit [Choose2Matter.org](http://Choose2Matter.org) or email [AngelaMaiers@gmail.com](mailto:AngelaMaiers@gmail.com)

Choose2Matter is embraced by thousands of schools around the world each year. It is an explosively growing movement that will change the world.

It is a global movement that seeks to make “mattering” a way of life. A challenge to **ACCEPT** that you matter - that you have a unique genius. An invitation to **ACCELERATE** the message of you matter to others. An expectation that you will **ACT** to contribute your genius to the world.

This framework empowers people to embrace vulnerability to examine what matters most to them, and why; to consider what breaks their heart about it; and to determine what they can do about it. The process produces fiercely empowered activists and innovators.

There is only one rule: **BE BRAVE**

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Genius is not a myth.

It is the realization that each and every person on the planet is capable of making one kind of contribution. It is internalizing beautiful truth that we each possess something within us the ability for game changing thinking and the potential to manifest breakthrough ideas that can help us break the chains of mediocrity and stir the best talents within.

So if you think you are willing, ready and brave enough to tap into your five-year-old self, we leave you with one simple question:

Do you believe the following statement?

**YOU ARE A GENIUS**.....  
**AND THE WORLD NEEDS YOUR CONTRIBUTION**  
ANGELA MAIERS

Do you believe it as fiercely as your students believe it? This revolution belongs to everyone. It does not belong to us. It is not yours. It's not even just theirs---it is all of ours.

We all contribute and make it possible. There is no guru, no oracles, no Jedi Masters.

We are just a group of people passionately committed to making our mark on the world. It's everyone's responsibility to grow, share and spread the impact we're creating.

Welcome to Genius Matters,

*Angela* ♡

