

ADVENTURES IN AUTHENTIC LEARNING

21 Step-by-Step Projects
From an Edtech Coach

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INTRODUCTION

Seeing the excitement on a student's face when they create, solve, or accomplish something new is an amazing and contagious experience. For many educators, this is why we teach, and this feeling inspires us to continue searching for new ways to achieve this and seek new adventures in our classrooms. Student enthusiasm for learning can happen at any grade level, although it's arguably more difficult to achieve in middle- and high-school classrooms. In my role as an edtech coach, I continually work to create these experiences for both students and teachers. I have found that more often than not, this enthusiasm happens in conjunction with authentic projects. The ISTE Standards for Students (International Society for Technology in Education [ISTE], 2016) recognize this as well, calling on teachers to encourage communication, creativity, student voice and choice, and other important skills to help develop engaged and lifelong learners.

As an edtech coach, I have the unique opportunity to truly see what is happening in the classrooms where I work, as well as gather a wealth of ideas from the teachers I coach. Through collaboration, shared ideas can build into something great that needs to be shared with an even broader group. That's partly how *Adventures in Authentic Learning* came about: Many of the projects and insights I share in this book grew from reflecting on classroom collaborations—between coach and teacher, teacher and students, and students and their peers. So whether you are a teacher or edtech coach, or fill another role in our schools, my hope is that you will take ideas from this book and build upon them, making them even better.

Many of the ideas and projects in this book focus on a similar goal: to foster communication skills and empower students as they engage in learning experiences that are authentic. So what does this mean? To me, authentic lessons incorporate some element of student choice and topics relevant to students. They also involve students in solving a problem or creating something, while engaging in tasks that incorporate skills we typically see in the workforce and our world outside of school. The ISTE Standards for Students focus on helping students build these much-needed skills, making them the perfect blueprint for getting started with helping your students become lifelong empowered learners and competent and creative communicators. To help you implement these standards with your students, as well as fulfill the ISTE Standards for Educators (ISTE, 2017), you'll find numerous connections between the standards and the project ideas presented in this book.

Throughout *Adventures in Authentic Learning*, you'll find suggestions and tools to help you engage students in authentic projects as well as research-rooted answers to questions I commonly receive from the teachers I coach. Each chapter contains a "Lesson Plans" section featuring step-by-step lessons and project documents you can immediately implement with your students—whether in the classroom or in a remote-learning environment.



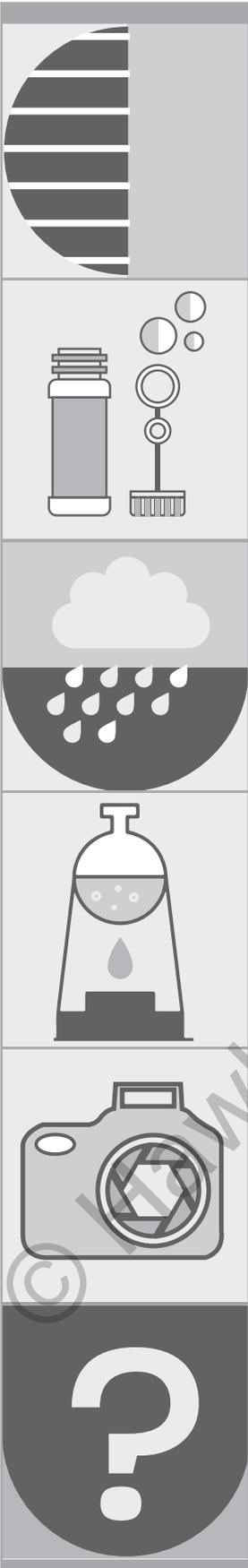
Look for the  and  icons to see which portions of a project are best implemented face-to-face and which ones students can accomplish working online, either independently or collaboratively.

Additionally, each chapter ends with a "Coach's Connection" section to assist educational technology coaches who are collaborating with teachers to implement authentic projects. Each "Coach's Connection" section features strategies and tips that align with the ISTE Standards for Coaches (ISTE, 2019), providing strategies and ideas to help you collaborate with teachers and better support students when implementing authentic learning lessons. Although these sections were designed for coaches, they contain useful information for any educator.

In addition, each chapter contains strategies and resources to help you engage in authentic projects. You'll learn about developing a project mindset, time management, creating projects with an authentic purpose, and helping students become better presenters. Resource links are provided throughout the book, and Appendix C serves as the *Adventures in Authentic Learning* toolbox, listing all the recommended resources and templates in one place.

As you read, I hope you share the enthusiasm I felt as I wrote this book. I am often amazed by how teachers take my suggestions even further with ideas I would never have thought of myself. Similarly, in the classroom, my most memorable and enjoyable times were when students were exploring, creating, and making their own meaning through research projects, book trailers, engineering challenges, and other authentic learning opportunities.

The satisfaction of witnessing students move beyond our expectations is immense. There is little more rewarding than hearing about students going home and working tirelessly on a project because they are so engaged and invested in the outcome. As the school year progresses and students become more comfortable with authentic, project-based learning, you will see them grow in their mastery of collaborating, speaking on-camera, writing, and other skills that will benefit them beyond the classroom. Simply put, authentic learning adventures are fun—not just for your students, but for you as well. So whether you are stuck in a rut filled with workbooks and test prep or just need some fresh ideas for your already engaging classroom, this book will provide ideas and projects so you can have fun working with your students and get excited for each new day as an educator.



CHAPTER 1

FOCUS ON THE LEARNING, NOT THE PRODUCT



however, you'll begin to see that the messiness is often when the best learning happens. This chapter focuses on getting you into that positive mindset to begin projects in your classroom. We will discuss how to frame projects for success, as well as how to truly assess what students are learning along the way. In addition, I provide some ideas for how you can use the ISTE Standards for Students, and in particular the Empowered Learner standard, to help students create their own yearlong, project-based goals, as well as assess their own learning.

DEVELOPING A PROJECT MINDSET

One way to ensure that you remain in a positive project mindset and focus on the process is by engaging in regular check-ins to gauge not only your students' progress with the project but also their level of understanding with the concepts you are teaching. This is easier to do when you think of the project as the main course, rather than the dessert. Students typically complete projects at the end of a unit to demonstrate what they've learned, like dessert at the end of a meal. Instead, I encourage you to weave the project throughout your unit, helping you and your students focus on the process. Here is an example of how this might look:

- ✦ **Lesson Introduction.** Grab your students' attention with a video, experiment, or other engaging content. Provide students with the rubric and project description. This is also a good time to assess students' prior knowledge and interest in the topic.
- ✦ **Vocabulary Instruction Mini-Lesson.** Many of my project rubrics focus on students using vocabulary in context. Early in your unit, I recommend incorporating content vocabulary with graphic organizers, such as Frayer Models, and opportunities for students to practice writing and speaking with content words.
- ✦ **Content Introduction.** At this point in your project, students are still engaging at Bloom's Taxonomy levels 1 and 2, working to recall and