

# Teacher NOTES

## Chancellor's Message

Dear Teachers,

In the midst of the busy holiday season - when every street and every school hallway is bustling and filled with excitement—I take a moment to reflect on our accomplishments over the past year.



My thoughts invariably turn to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* 43 and its widely-quoted opening sentence, "How do I love thee?"

In the spirit of this great American poem, I'd like to count the ways I'm grateful to you and honor your unwavering commitment to our students and school communities.

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*Happy Holidays from all of us at the DOE*

*Peana Sobel*

## Chancellor's Message

Dear Teachers,

In the midst of the busy holiday season—when every street and every school hallway is bustling and filled with excitement—I take a moment to reflect on our accomplishments over the past year. My thoughts invariably turn to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* 43 and its widely-quoted opening sentence, "How do I love thee?" In the spirit of this great American poem, I'd like to count the ways I'm grateful to you and honor your unwavering commitment to our students and school communities.



I'm grateful to you for embracing the [Framework for Great Schools](#), our holistic approach to improving student achievement. Through this research-based model, we have expanded the role of our superintendents, enabling them to give your school communities the support they need and allowing you to focus on your students, parents, and families.

I'm grateful to you for supporting [Pre-K for All](#), one of our greatest accomplishments. This year, thanks to our early childhood educators, we are delivering free, full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten to more than 65,000 four-year-olds, making New York City a national model for early childhood education. This accomplishment sets these students up for success and prepares them for bright futures.

I'm grateful to you for welcoming parents into your schools and creating inclusive, healthy, and supportive environments for students and their families. Together, we have ushered in a new era in [parent engagement](#). I encourage you to read [Ideas to Engage Parents and Families this Winter](#) in this edition for suggestions on how you can engage parents and families this winter.

I'm also grateful for:

- Our newly designated school holidays—[Eid al-Fitr](#), [Eid al-Adha](#), and [Lunar New Year](#)—which reflect the strength and diversity of our City. Our schools remind me of a Maya Angelou quote, "... in diversity there is beauty and there is strength." For new cultural guides on these holidays, click [here](#) and scroll down the page, and for Lunar New Year celebration ideas, read [Ideas to Engage Parents and Families this Winter](#).
- Our enhanced STEM initiatives, including training for up to 200 schools through new, multi-day STEM Institutes; Summer STEM for second, seventh, and tenth graders; and the STEM Framework, the City's first structured approach to implementing STEM initiatives in our schools. [Read more](#) about the Summer STEM Institute from your colleagues in the June edition of [Teacher Notes](#).
- Our launch of [Learning Partners Plus](#), which is allowing even more school leaders and teachers to share strong practices, and the expansion of [Showcase Schools](#) to encourage greater collaboration between teachers in school communities across the City. For one teacher's reflection and takeaways on her Showcase School visit, read [Teacher Spotlight. Interschool Visitation Yields Insights](#).

- Our new and expanding Dual Language and Transitional Bilingual Education programs that offer English Language Learners more opportunities for high-quality instruction, and the 15 new Model Dual Language programs that will foster collaboration among Dual Language educators. [To hear more](#) from one of your Dual Language educator colleagues revisit our March edition of [Teacher Notes](#).
- The work of our teachers in [Community Schools](#) and [Renewal Schools](#). You are embracing and maximizing community support to drive student achievement. [Look back](#) at the Community Schools educator profile in our March edition of [Teacher Notes](#).
- Our expanded [Autism Spectrum Disorder Nest and Horizon](#) programs, which aim to raise student achievement and increase children's social skills and self-confidence.
- Our innovative arts programming, reflected in: the highest number of arts teachers in a decade, including an initiative to bring new teachers to 113 low-arts middle and high schools; the expansion of [Teen Thursdays](#), the after-school initiative that is enabling middle-school students to take advantage of rich learning opportunities at the City's premier cultural institutions; a partnership to provide 20,000 students with tickets to the Broadway musical [Hamilton](#); and the expansion of the [SING](#) program to 10 additional high school campuses, enabling more of our students to write, cast, rehearse, and perform in a musical.
- Our new [Kathleen Grimm School for Leadership and Sustainability at Sandy Ground](#), a net-zero school named after our late DOE deputy chancellor, who was a tireless advocate for the City's school children.

This is certainly not an exhaustive list; I'd need a few more pages to highlight all that we have accomplished this year. I hope this gives you an idea of the depth and breadth of our achievements, which you have all helped bring to fruition. I would love to hear the additional achievements you have made in your schools, and invite you to share them with [me](#).

We are at the close of a transformative year, one that saw the announcement of Mayor de Blasio's [Equity and Excellence initiatives](#): universal second grade literacy; computer science, algebra, Advanced Placement courses, and college access for all students; and a "single shepherd" for high-needs middle and high school students and a new program in District 23 to share best practices and foster stronger relationships between district and charter schools.

Through these reforms, we aim to raise achievement across all of our public schools. I look forward to continuing to work with you on behalf of these initiatives in 2016 and beyond.

In closing, allow me to express my gratitude for your dedication and hard work. Every day you guide our next generation of New Yorkers. You are helping to shape who they will become and the impact they will have. Thank you for going above and beyond to ensure that all of our students graduate with the skills they need to realize their dreams.

I wish you a Winter Recess filled with joy and restorative moments with family and friends.

Warmly,

Carmen

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## Big Apple Grades Pre-K-12 Book List 2015: Teacher-to-Teacher Recommendations

In celebration of the strides your students have made this year and the opening of the *Big Apple Awards: Recognizing Teacher Excellence in New York City* [nomination period](#), we asked [Big Apple Fellows](#) to share a book that resonated with their students in 2015.

We hope that you discover a new book to inspire your students in 2016, and recognize the impact of one of your colleagues by nominating them for a [Big Apple Award](#). Big Apple Fellows will serve on the [Chancellor's teacher advisory group](#) for the 2016-17 school year and receive a classroom grant, while continuing to be leaders in their classrooms and school communities. Together, let's celebrate the great teaching happening in classrooms like yours across the City.



### **The Things They Carried**

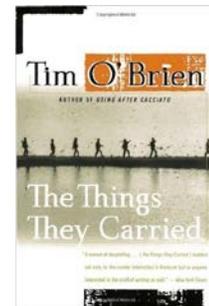
Tim O'Brien (1998)

"Seventeen years ago, this book saved me. I was a first-year teacher struggling to interest my sophomores in literature. I found this collection of vignettes, and my non-readers became readers. As my AP Literature students and I discovered last year, O'Brien's novel is also a master class in the art of writing, full of voice-enhancing metonymy and zeugma, and yes, even the dreaded sentence fragment."



**Rick Ouimet**

Millennium Art Academy/Adlai Stevenson Campus  
Soundview, Bronx  
Grade 12, English  
17 years teaching



### **Guns, Germs, and Steel**

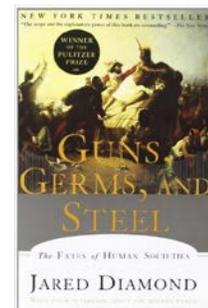
Jared Diamond (1999)

"Rather than viewing civilizations as "successful" or "unsuccessful" based solely on factors such as intelligence and innate ability, my students explore the advantages and disadvantages of geography and the importance it has had on the development of civilizations in different parts of the world through this book."



**Joseph Pesqueira**

Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics  
Morissania, Bronx  
Grades 10 and 11  
AP World History, U.S. History, History Through



Film  
7 years teaching

### The Crossover

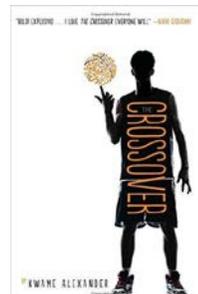
Kwame Alexander (2014)  
Ages 10-12

"This book was a wonderful discovery this year, a story told in verse about the relationship between two brothers who love basketball."



#### Joan Fiorillo

J.H.S. 218 James P. Sinnott  
East New York, Brooklyn  
Grade 6, ICT Teacher-English, Math, Social Studies,  
Science  
34 years teaching



### The Most Beautiful Place in the World

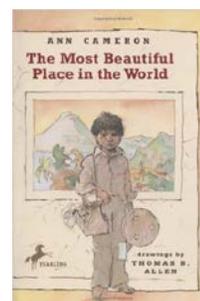
Ann Cameron (1993)  
Ages 8-12

"This book illustrates that if we set a goal for ourselves we can reach it with courage and determination. My students theorize what would they do or how would they feel if they were the protagonist of the story."



#### Melisa Stoller

I.S. 528 Bea Fuller Rodgers School  
Washington Heights, Manhattan  
Grade 6, ELA/ESL  
9 years teaching



### The One and Only Ivan

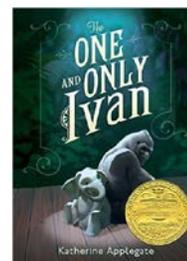
Katherine Applegate (2012)  
Ages 8-12

"My students are captivated by this book's humor and sadness. Through it they have explored the concept of perspective and learned powerful lessons about friendship and integrity."



#### Lauren Bakian

P.S. 110 Florence Nightingale  
Lower East Side, Manhattan  
Grade 4, Common Branches  
7 years teaching



### The Thankful Book

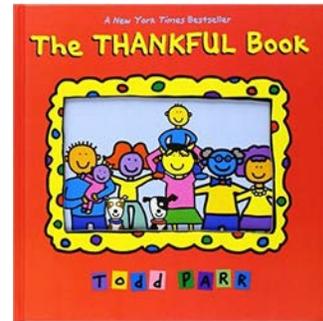
Todd Parr (2012)

Ages 3-6

"This book gives voice to the little moments we all take for granted and helps my students reflect upon those they have never vocalized: 'I am thankful for my shadow because it makes me look taller,' and 'I have never met a 4-year-old that didn't want to look taller!'"



**Phyllis Berk**  
P.S. 188 Kingsbury  
Bayside, Queens  
Pre-K  
20 years teaching



### The Squeaky, Creaky Bed

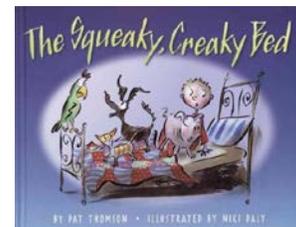
Pat Thomson (2003)

Ages 2-6

"As we read, the children enjoy chiming in and chanting along! There are many opportunities to make sound effects and funny voices. It resonates with my students because it is about family."



**Rhonda Corin**  
P.S. 101 School in the Gardens  
Forest Hills, Queens  
Pre-K  
25 years teaching

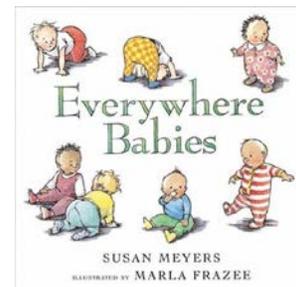


### Everywhere Babies

Susan Meyers (2004)

Ages 2-3

"Reading to my young students helps build a connection between the things babies love most: your voice and closeness, and books. When children are read to with joy and excitement they begin to associate books with happiness."





**Margaret Diercks Henfling (Ms. Peggy)**

LYFE Program Beach Channel Educational Campus  
Rockaway Park, Queens  
2 months to 3 years old, Early Childhood  
25 years teaching

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If you're looking for more books for your school community or classroom in 2016, please visit [TED.com](http://TED.com):

- [Your Holiday Reading List: 58 Books Recommended by TED Speakers](#)
- [TED-Ed: 10 Teachers Share the Books That Changed Their Lives](#)

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## Teacher Spotlight: Monique Matthew Reflects on Interschool Visitations

"Collaborative teachers" is one of the elements highlighted in the [Framework for Great Schools](#). Professional learning is critical for teachers at every stage of their careers.

**Monique Matthew**, a kindergarten teacher with 15 years of experience, visited classrooms at Central Park East II, East Harlem as part of the [Showcase Schools](#) program this fall. Monique reflected on her visit and how it has influenced her teaching practice.



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### How did you approach the school visit? What goals did you have?

**Monique:** I went there with an open mind, hoping to hear, experience, and learn new and different strategies I could take back to my school. I was looking for new ideas to improve student engagement, rigor, and grow my students' critical-thinking skills. After the visit, I was sold on the strategy—developing student voice through constructive play centers.

**When you reflect on your visit to Central Park East II, what practices did you discover that you now utilize in your classroom?**

**Monique:** "I had the opportunity to see what the [Work Time/Choice Time](#) (DOE log-in required) strategy for kindergarten looks, feels, and sounds like. I created times within our classroom schedule for work time. Students have the opportunity twice a week to have the opportunity to choose between six work centers: art, math, science, writing, blocks, and housekeeping. Work time structure includes 5-10 minutes for student choice selection, 30 minutes of engaged play, and five minutes for reflection. During our reflection time, students share something that they discovered or images they created that they wanted to share with the class.



Another practice I discovered was the use of technology. Instead of using the tri-boards as a visual to display each center and number of students allowed to work in that center, I created the same system on the Smartboard. The students are now able to slide their names to their choice activity. They are also able to have the visual display on the board, which I find is helpful to maintain classroom structure. Our newest center is called "construction," and my students love it. This center allows them to use their imagination to build abstract structures."

#### **Would you share an "a-ha" moment from your visit?**

**Monique:** "One particular class I visited captivated me; I felt like the student and I were wowed by the moment. Looking intently through a magnifying glass, a pre-schooler observed a snail as it crawled across her hand. She explained how the snail felt, told my colleague and me about its habitat, and shared what it eats. I want my students to have that level of engagement that deepens to captivation and intense thought."

#### **Would you recommend other teachers visit a Showcase School? If so, would you recommend they go as a group from their school community?**

**Monique:** "Absolutely! I have already shared the benefits of students developing their voice via play with my group. In fact, it is contagious; I shared my learning and thoughts with everyone I meet: my colleagues, parents, and administrators. They are all in support of this strategy to engage students and positively influence student achievement."

If you're interested in visiting a [Showcase School](#), please review the [list of schools](#) opening their doors to fellow educators in 2016 and talk to your school leader about how to make the most of your visit.

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## **Ideas to Engage Parents and Families This Winter**

As you think about your professional resolutions and goals for 2016, consider how you will strengthen your relationships with parents and families. Principals and superintendents share stories illustrating the strong ties you've already created in your school communities. The

creative and effective ways you have leveraged your [40 minutes of parent engagement time](#) each week.

To support you, Executive Superintendent [Yolanda Torres](#) and the Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) has created a winter parent engagement calendar to highlight recommended strategies from your fellow educators across the City with key events on our 2015-16 school calendar. Please let [me](#) know how you and your school community make these ideas your own and if you have more ideas for the [40 Minutes of Parent Engagement](#).

### January: Prepare for Mid-Winter Recess with Parents

Check in with students and their families to learn how they plan to spend the February mid-Winter recess. Will your students be spending their time in New York City? Will they be interacting with other children their own age? Will they be taking a family trip? Take all of these ideas into consideration when you create lists of books, television shows, movies, and activities students can engage in while out of the classroom. While keeping students engaged, these recommendations and activities will also continue to inspire their critical thinking and expand their vocabulary.



### February: Organize a Lunar New Year Celebration for Families

This school year, our DOE community is observing three new school holidays: [Lunar New Year \(Monday, February 8\)](#), [Eid al-Fitr \(July 2016\)](#), and [Eid al-Adha \(September 2016\)](#). These holidays recognize the heritage of our Asian-American and Muslim communities and are wonderful opportunities for the entire school community to learn. For Lunar New Year, create an event where students can introduce their family traditions to the school community. The [Learning About Lunar New Year guide](#) is an excellent resource for teachers.



### March: Plan Student-Led Parent Conferences with Your Students

Start thinking about student-led conferences when you return from Winter Recess. Student-led conferences help students build self-confidence and poise as they maturely speak for themselves about their own work performance and habits. While this format typically begins at the start of the school year, the beginning of the calendar year is another great time to introduce them. Students keep track of their progress toward self-selected goals. To provide evidence of that progress, they maintain their own portfolio for each academic subject. At the student-led conference, students lead their parents through their portfolio, highlighting accomplishments and reflecting on areas for growth. It's a great way for them to share responsibility for their achievement. Students emerge from these conferences with a sense of fulfillment and direction.



As you consider these ideas, and those included on the [40 Minutes of Parent Engagement](#) website, I encourage you to collaborate with your school leaders and your [parent coordinator](#). They are great partners to ensure you have the resources you need and the support of the entire staff and administration to make your efforts to engage parents and families a success.

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## Great Teachers Are Great Recruiters

Every year newly hired teachers tout the value of talking to a DOE teacher and school leader as one of the primary reasons they decide to teach for a NYC public school. Thank you for spreading the word!

Do you know a career-changer or a recent college graduate who does not have a background in education? Share the [NYC Teaching Fellows application](#) with them. (Deadline: January 21). Do you know a currently certified teacher or a friend who will be certified in 2016-17? Share the [2016-17 New Teacher express interest form](#). Together we will recruit the next great cohort of teachers.

**SPARK**  
**OPPORTUNITY**  

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**TEACH NYC**

## Book of the Season

### **An A from Miss Keller**

*Written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco*  
(G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2015)  
Recommended for Grades K-3

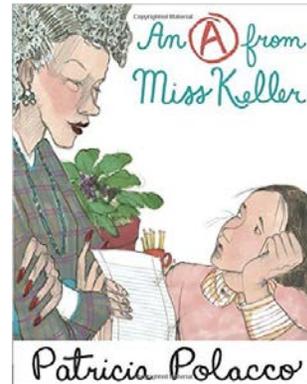
Dear Reader,

**An A from Miss Keller** is a moving tribute to the real-life teacher who inspired the author to become a writer. This book is not only a love letter to a beloved teacher, it speaks to the power of educators to change young people's lives and help them realize their potential.

The young Patricia is flattered to be chosen for Miss Keller's writing class, but petrified of her stern, critical teacher. Not only is "Killer Keller" impossible to please, she has never given a student an A. Although Patricia works hard on her assignments, her writing fails to impress her demanding teacher. Then, an encouraging, older neighbor and an unexpected loss help Patricia make an emotional connection through her writing.

In the book, we see Patricia in her bedroom, crafting what she considers some of her best writing, and eager to read her masterpiece out loud in class. But the next day, Miss Keller cannot abide her student's imprecise use of language. Determined to meet her teacher's high standards, Patricia writes "with oodles of heart and feeling" on her next paper, only to earn a C. "The reader needs to feel what you feel...but not in an ordinary way," Miss Keller says. "Be daring, unexpected, surprising...original!"

Patricia seeks solace from her neighbor, Pop, a pastry chef whose sons had been in Miss Keller's class. Pop not only listens and offers support, he shares a secret about Miss Keller that helps Patricia see the good in her teachers' methods. Patricia comes to realize that Miss Keller is hard



on her because she believes she has talent.

Already upset as she works to select a topic for the term essay in Miss Keller's class, Patricia learns that Pop has died of a sudden heart attack. That night, overtaken with emotion and no longer concerned with what her teacher thinks, Patricia sits down and writes a moving tribute to her neighbor.

Miss Keller deems the paper a "*crowning example of a personal narrative.*" In red across the top of the cover sheet, Miss Keller writes, "You've given your words wings. I am departing from my custom...here is your A."

We must teach our students to accept the challenges we present to them, believe in themselves, and not back down under pressure-and celebrate them as they accomplish milestones along the road to mastery. We must also set a high bar for ourselves as educators, and work as though we are being evaluated by our students. Like Miss Keller, let us commit to helping all of our students find their voice and give their words wings.

Warmly,

Carmen

Adapted from the December 2015 *Principal Notes* Book of the Month.

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