

# Lesson 3: Localize, localize, localize (and design)

*JEA One Story Fall 2020*

## OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Student-teacher communication, teacher-parent communication, teacher-admin communication, and teacher-teacher communication all play the ultimate role in creating school community. And resolving conflicts productively is a huge challenge in teenage life. Use the article “Turning a Teacher Into an Ally” as an exercise in discovering story angles.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Students will read a story for a national audience and find elements that can be applied locally.
2. Students will analyze the layout of story and sidebar to discuss cohesion.
3. Students may use this layout as a template for a current story or an in-class design exercise.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

1. At Home article “Turning a Teacher Into an Ally”
2. Article sidebar “Revisit School Days in Novels”
3. Paper, pen, pencil

## ACTIVITY

Students may initially resist the article because it is geared toward elementary school children and parents but this is actually good material for discussion.

1. Have students read the article together in pairs, noting any themes/topics that could apply to their school.
2. Work through the article as a class, section by section. Some possible themes/topics mentioned: teacher response to parent communications, the feelings of lower-income parents about how school perceives them, the lives of students with allergies or immuno-compromised systems,

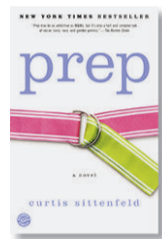
rubrics/answer keys/how students know if they're progressing in a class, steps to building good communication, the PTA, LGBTQ+ parents, BIPOC parents, appropriate levels of parent/teacher involvement in student work, how to approach a teacher

3. Have students move into groups of four or switch partners to discuss how any themes they've discovered could be localized.
4. Students pitch their ideas to the class.
5. If time in class or for another lesson, have students review this layout and discuss the following elements of design: repetition, how the pull quote is used, symbolism of illustration, relevance of sidebar for intended audience, overall cohesion.
6. If desired, have students recreate layout for two similarly related topics, combining a real life issue with fictional representations of that topic, whether in book, movie, television, or other medium.

# Revisit School Days In Novels

Nostalgic for sharp pencils and freshly polished gym floors? Let these books take you back, no masks or Wi-Fi required.

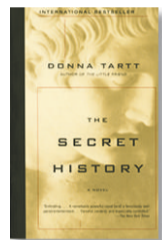
BY ELISABETH EGAN  
AND JOUMANA KHATIB



## PREP

By Curtis Sittenfeld

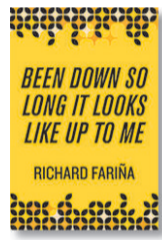
A 14-year-old from South Bend, Ind., tries to find her place at a Massachusetts boarding school, where she gets a crash course on what really matters in life.



## THE SECRET HISTORY

By Donna Tartt

At a rural, elite college in Vermont, a small band of friends are drawn into a Bacchanalian plot to kill one of their own. Tartt's taut and creepy campus thriller is beloved for good reason.



## BEEN DOWN SO LONG IT LOOKS LIKE UP TO ME

By Richard Fariña

Welcome to the campus of a school in upstate New York at the peak of 1960s hedonism and unrest. The lesson of this classic: Everything old is new again.



## THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE

By Muriel Spark

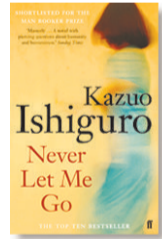
In 1930s Scotland, a group of students are dazzled by their teacher, Miss Brodie, until a betrayal by one of them brings about her quick, embittered downfall.



## THE HATE U GIVE

By Angie Thomas

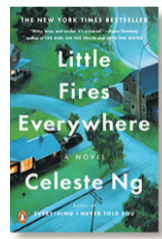
A Black student from a poor neighborhood works hard to fit in at a mostly white prep school. When a friend is killed by a cop, she loses her footing in both worlds.



## NEVER LET ME GO

By Kazuo Ishiguro

Three adults who attended Hailsham, a bucolic boarding school for "special students," begin to realize with dread what sets them apart.



## LITTLE FIRES EVERYWHERE

By Celeste Ng

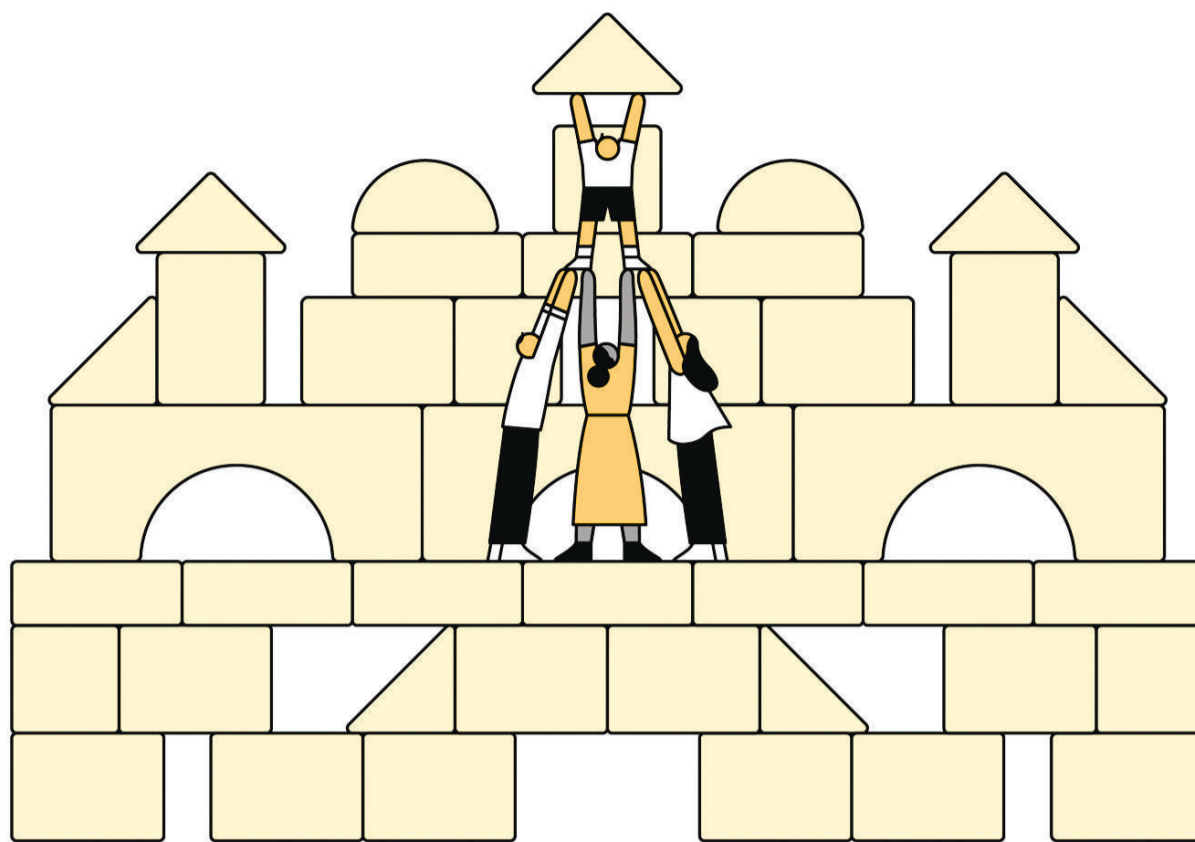
In the melting pot of a large Ohio high school, the daughter of a free-spirited single mother gets mixed up with siblings from a wealthy local family. Tension simmers.



## SKIPPY DIES

By Paul Murray

At a school for teenage misfits in Dublin, the title character's death — the tragic outcome of a doughnut-eating contest — is only the beginning of the absurdity.



ROSE WONG

# Turn a Teacher Into Your Ally

When it comes to parent-educator relationships, this year is 'almost like a full reset. A horrible reset, but a full reset.'

BY KATHERINE CUSUMANO

DURING A USUAL school year, Maria Davis-Pierre is one of those parents who regularly reach out to their children's teachers. A mother of three in Lake Worth, Fla., and the founder of the parenting organization Autism in Black, Ms. Davis-Pierre checks in monthly via email and requests meetings upon receiving progress reports, working with her kids' teachers to make sure that her eldest daughter especially — who is 8 and on the autism spectrum — is meeting her goals and getting the most from her schooling. "Especially for Black parents, we have to let them know that we're involved," Ms. Davis-Pierre said. "We want to know what's going on."

The most successful relationships between families and educators are rooted in routine exchanges that go beyond periodic parent-teacher conferences. "Trust is going to be an important component," said Herman Knopf, a researcher who studies early childhood education at the University of Florida. "It is developed over time between teachers and parents through consistent, open communication." And the benefits of a robust relationship with a child's teacher are clear: "It enables the teacher to better understand the child," Dr. Knopf said, "so that the strategies and tactics that she uses to support learning in the classroom are supported by the knowledge that the parents bring in."

It's difficult not to look at the fall with dread, given the wildly uneven and last-minute strategies schools are adopting to welcome students back — in person, remotely or a combination of the two. According to a recent survey by Learning Heroes, an organization that provides education support to parents, only 33 percent of parents over all — and 28 and 27 percent of Black and Hispanic parents, respectively — had regular access to their child's teacher in the spring. Yet the circumstances also present an opportunity to rethink relationships between families and teachers, whose roles are aligned now in a unique way.

"It's almost like a full reset," said James Lopez, a stay-at-home father of three on Staten Island. "A horrible reset, but a full reset."

### Establish relationships early.

Reaching out at the start of the school year might feel less intuitive when most families and

teachers are overwhelmed and few have answers — but it's as important as ever to start forming a positive, collaborative relationship with your child's teacher at or before the onset of the school year. Given the stressors currently facing both parents and teachers, this might be more challenging, according to Alison Borman, a fifth-grade teacher and the parent of a third grader in San Diego, but some effort early on can make it easier to come together to solve problems later in the year.

Teachers usually initiate relationships, but parents can be proactive, asking their children's teachers for an initial phone or Zoom meeting to discuss expectations and ask questions. And if teachers aren't responsive, try again — or try getting in touch with a principal. "Be persistent in trying to sustain those relationships," said Leslie P. Arreola-Hillenbrand, the founder of the parent coaching firm Latinx Parenting in Santa Ana, Calif. "If that bond is real, I think teachers will reciprocate."

### Share what you know.

Instructors now have more limited insight into how their students are faring academically and emotionally. But parents amass "an ever-deepening well of information about their children" that they can share with teachers, according to Alejandro Gibes de Gac, the chief executive of Springboard Collaborative, a national nonprofit focused on childhood literacy.

This can include your child's likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, or personality traits that might come out in the classroom. For the families of kids receiving special education, it also means providing their children's teacher with more current information than what's listed in their Individualized Education Plan case file that the teacher receives at the beginning of the year, according to Cortney Golub, a high school teacher and parent of two 5-year-olds in San Diego. After all, that I.E.P. is developed based on a classroom-learning environment; sitting down at a computer for remote instruction might pose an outside challenge to a child with a disability.

These conversations can also help instructors understand the family circumstances that might present obstacles to their relationship. Even before the pandemic, language barriers, access to technology, the schedules of working parents and unconscious biases

around race and socioeconomic status all posed challenges to parent-teacher relationships. Plus, some parents or guardians may have had negative experiences in the very schools their children attend, which breeds mistrust.

"Maybe the biggest challenge is a mind-set issue within our education system," Mr. Gibes de Gac said. "I think all too often, our school system treats low-income parents as liabilities rather than as assets. If we want to support parents as educators, first, we need to believe in them."

### Ask (lots of) questions.

In the spring, Ms. Golub struggled to sit her kids down for online classes. The isolation and anxiety she and her wife, Annie, felt were compounded because their son is immunocompromised and has learning and language challenges; she was left with plenty of concerns about boundaries, including, "How much should my paws be in their space, especially when I'm fighting to get them engaged?" Ms. Golub said. "What are the downfalls of overstepping?"

Inquire about curriculum concerns, kids' social and emotional learning and where they're starting the year academically, and even how the school plans to address the protests that swept through the country this summer. You can also ask for support, in the form of grading rubrics and answer keys for your children's coursework, advice on occupational and physical therapy, help matching with other families forming pods, supplies to set up learning spaces at home or alternatives to parts of remote school that aren't working for your child.

### Set expectations for communicating.

Phone, text, email, video call, even home visits: Educators and families have different preferences, and needs, when it comes to modes of communication, and you should be clear about what works best for you. Not all families have access to the internet or a computer at home; others have work schedules that don't permit calls during the day. Keep conversations brief and focused.

Find out how your school will share the answers to common queries, like due dates and schedules — ideally, in one centralized place like a website or weekly newsletter. And perhaps most

important: Practice empathy. (This includes empathy for teachers whose unions have proposed striking.) Both educators and parents are working hard to make school happen.

### Create a plan to hit goals.

Under normal circumstances, families and schools share milestones they want students to reach — consolidating their relationship around a common objective. Now, it's key to make those goals more explicit and come up with a road map to achieve them with your child's teacher. Bibb Hubbard, the founder and president of Learning Heroes, suggested including kids in the learning plan, "so that they feel a part of that and connected to it as well."

Mr. Gibes de Gac's organization, Springboard Collaborative, suggests setting goals in five-to-10-week cycles. In Baltimore, Masika McCoy's daughter Camille worked with her second-grade teacher for five weeks during the summer to improve her reading as part of Springboard's family-educator learning accelerator. Working closely with her daughter's teacher has helped inform how Ms. McCoy is approaching the fall.

### Get active with the P.T.A.

As vice president of the parent-teacher association at her daughter's school, Ms. Davis-Pierre has found herself in a position to advocate for perspectives that aren't otherwise represented in the P.T.A. "My concern is always the intersection of race and disability," she said. This fall, as her district wrestles with how to send students back to school campuses safely, she and other P.T.A. members are also figuring out how to support families who choose to keep their children home.

At their best, P.T.A.s have empowered parents: supporting them with distance learning, helping address food insecurity and technology access, and answering questions about students' social and emotional well-being, according to Leslie Boggs, the president of the National P.T.A. For some parents, taking on another obligation might not be realistic, but those who do have the time and inclination can help speak up for those who can't be there, and report back.

Most of all, remember that there's no model that works for everyone. "As parents, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to get it right," Ms. Arreola-Hillenbrand said. "It's not anything anybody has a blueprint for."