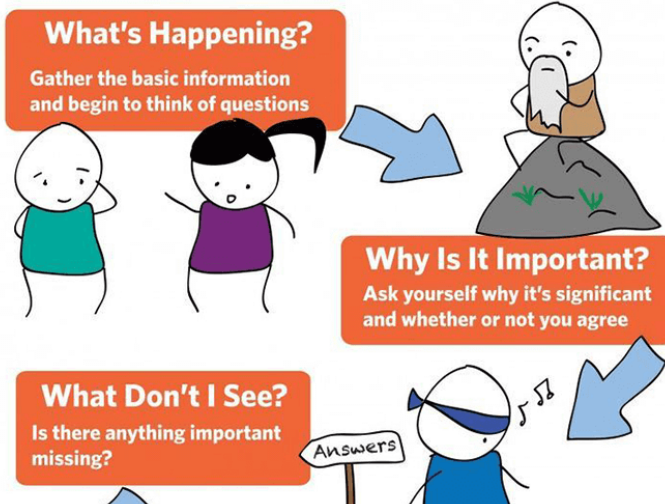


# Authenticity Matters: 12 Ideas To Make Learning 'Real-World'

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## Questions a Critical Thinker Asks



## Authenticity Matters: 12 Ideas To Make Learning 'Real-World'

contributed by **Shireen Jaffer**

As educators, we have all had at least one student approach us with the question, "How will this help me in the real world?"

Every year, teachers are reminded of the academic

requirements they must help their students fulfill. These requirements typically involve students taking many tests throughout the year. Accordingly, educators feel pressure to ensuring their curriculum leads to passing test scores.

This pressure can also leave teachers struggling to ensure their lesson plans allow students to apply their learning to their interests in the real world. To help you alleviate this struggle, here are 12 activities for your classroom that encourage interest exploration.


## Authenticity Matters: 12 Ideas To Make Learning 'Real-World'

### 1. Use TedTalks to spark ideas and model passion-based learning.

Regardless of what topic you are introducing to your class, there is likely a TedTalk (or alternative discussion) on it. Students learn best by hearing multiple perspectives on an issue (just like our kids sometimes listen to advice from strangers, even if you've been giving them that same advice for months).

This will increase engagement, but also promote interest exploration. Instead of finding a TedTalk yourself, allow students to identify TedTalks regarding the





specific topic. Inevitably, they will come across talks on other topics they may find interesting. By introducing TedTalks to your students, you open up a resource that they can continue learning from.

Using this format as a model, you can begin the ongoing conversation around authenticity by asking students what's most important to them.

## **2. Bring 'real professionals' from the 'real world' into the classroom.**

Whether you're working with elementary age children or teenagers, you can invite guest speakers that work in a field related to the topic you are discussing within the classroom. This is straightforward for classes like Drama or Environmental Science, but what about the "not-so-specific" classes?

Let's say you teach fifth graders and your lesson plan includes teaching students the capitals of each state. Bring in a guest speaker who works in Politics or Government so that they can help students understand the purpose of capitals.

Even if the students are not interested in Government or Politics, guest speakers in general increase student engagement, as well as make professionals more accessible to students, key for organic mentorships that facilitate interest exploration.

## **3. Get feedback from 'real professionals' in the 'real world.'**


When working on projects, help students identify professionals within the community who have expertise on the topic at hand and can provide pointed feedback. This will help students become comfortable with interacting with adults outside of the academic environment.

And the more conversations students have with adults, the more likely they are to build mentorships. Mentorships in turn can facilitate conversations around interests and career paths.

## **4. Help students see 'what' and 'why.'**

Implement reflections at the end of lesson plans and projects. In these reflections, allow students to actively reflect on how lesson plans connected to their interests.





Introduce the concept of “transferable skills” to all students. Help them understand that even if an idea or topic may not relate to their interests, the skills developed while learning are transferable to other professions.

## **5. Connect students with organizations.**

Many industries have professional organizations, such as The American Institute of Graphic Arts for designers and unions for specialists. Encourage students to reach out to those organizations to attend a meeting and learn firsthand how these professionals interact and learn from one another.

This activity can be tied into any lesson plan, as many lessons involve teamwork and group projects. Each student should go into these meetings with detailed questions that they’d like to get answered and write a thorough reflection once they get home to fully process the experience.

## **6. Incorporate a job shadow project.**

Create an assignment requiring students to do a job shadow for a few hours in a profession that intrigues them, whether that’s shadowing their aunt who works at an ad agency or the school principal.

Help them with the outreach to these professionals (even if they happen to be closely connected to them) to foster professional communication skills. And there is a bonus for implementing points two, three, and five from this article: students will have an easier time finding professionals to job shadow.

## **7. Help students create interest-based presentations.**

Ask students what they’d like to do when they grow up. Start this as an informal discussion and have students pick a group based on common interests in a few major categories, for example creative pursuits.

Allow time for research to figure out a specific position within that field and what it takes to get there, in terms of education and experience. Have students create a presentation on that job, why they are interested in the field, and what requirements they need to meet. Pair this with guest speakers or encourage students to watch TedTalks from professionals in this field to learn how they got to where they are.



## 8. Use Project-Based Learning or Problem-Based Learning

Project-based learning (learning through projects) and Problem-based learning (learning activities that begin with a challenge or 'problem' often authentic to the student) are useful frameworks to bring real-world issues into the classroom and take student-work out into the real-world.

Brainstorming [ideas for project-based learning](#) that begin and end in native communities important to students can not only increase student motivation, but can add authenticity to the academic work students spend so much of their childhood doing.

## 9. Encourage authentic community involvement.

Every student I know has had to write a book report on a biography, or research the background of an invention. Similarly, it would be beneficial for students to get involved with the community and create a presentation on the people they met, and lessons learned through the involvement.

This will encourage students to explore different ways to get involved within the community, and in doing so, they'll need to actively reflect on what interests them.


## 10. Create a 'Bring an adult to school' day.

A child may not be interested in the same field as their parents, but the child may have a classmate whose parents' work fascinates them. Make sure students prepare ahead of time for this day; give them a list of the professionals and fields represented so that they can come prepared with questions.

Help them learn proper ways to approach professionals and encourage active listening skills. Some teachers may already have guest speakers involved with your classes, or have implemented TedTalks within your lesson plans. But be aware of how you're implementing these ideas. Guest speakers are most beneficial if there is two-way communication between speaker and student.

## 11. Invite school counselors to get involved.





Also, counselors are a great resource. Ask them for help with the ideas above that require community involvement. I have spoken to many counselors that wish teachers involved them more within the classrooms. The more we collaborate, with each other and with our students, the better the learning experience will be for all of us.

## 12. Incorporate Genius Hour into your unit and lesson design.

- - Read [6 Principles Of Genius Hour](#)
  - Read [What Is Genius Hour?](#)

### **Bonus: 13. Leverage alumni.**

Many schools have alumni networks. Some schools leverage these networks better than others. If your school has a staff member that works closely with alumni, invite the staff member to present to your students.

They can talk about the alumni they have interacted with, the types of fields those alumni are involved in, and more. As students participate in projects of varying topics in school, they will know that alumni exist who may have experience with those topics.

If your school does not leverage the alumni network, create a simple LinkedIn group, invite alumni, and begin to engage in conversations around supporting current students.

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