AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

FIELD GUIDE
FOR EDUCATORS



BROWN
Center for the Study of
Race and Ethnicity in America

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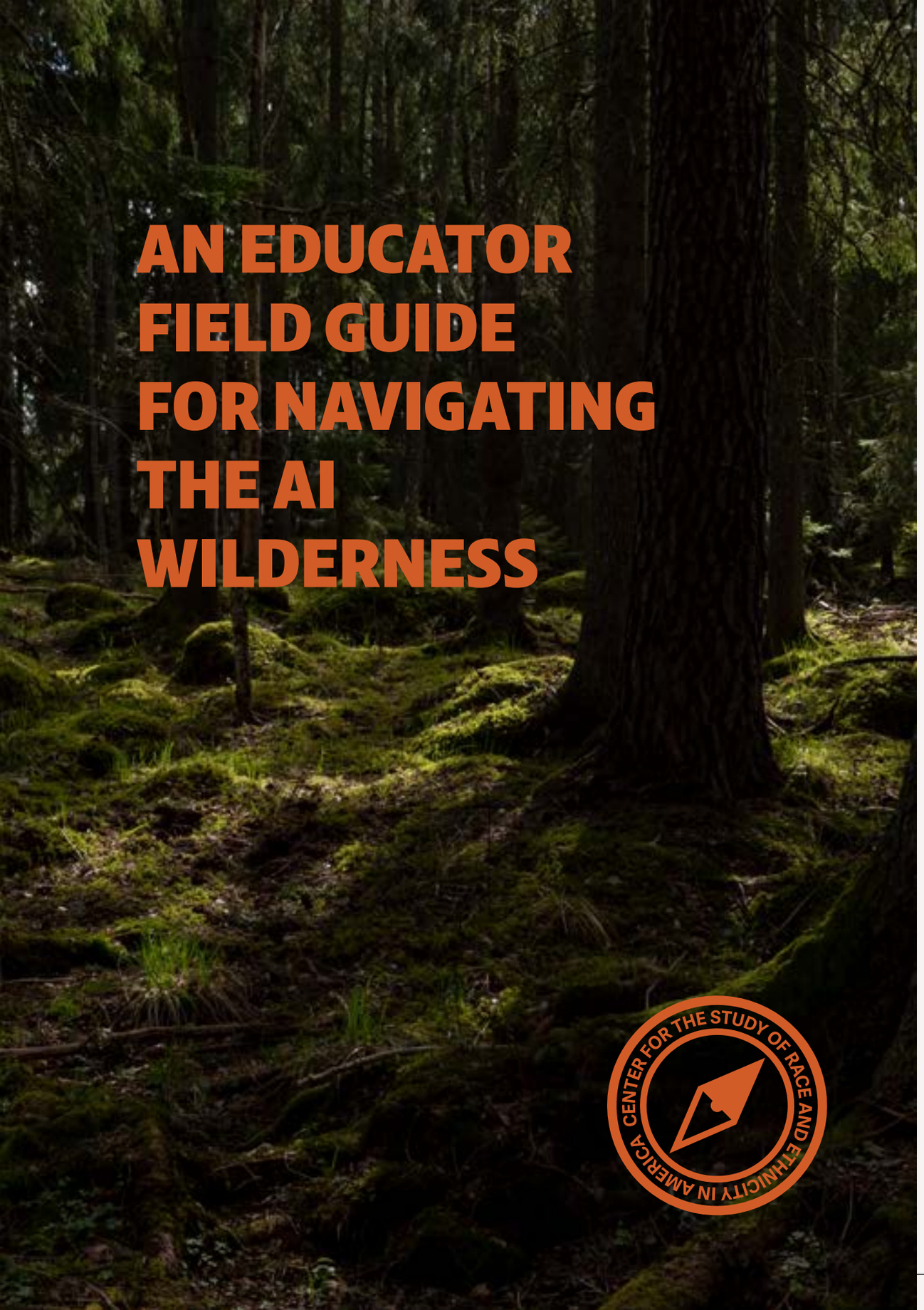
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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN AMERICA



Artificial Intelligence (AI) is technology that learns, reasons, and performs advanced human-like thinking tasks. AI is developed with the goal of performing functions similar to a human brain. This means being able to brainstorm, categorize, predict, make decisions, and problem solve. We use it everyday, sometimes even without knowing it. For example, AI technology is in our navigation systems, like Google Maps, our virtual assistants, like Siri or Alexa, and in our streaming platforms like Netflix or Youtube.

AI is also becoming increasingly present in the work we do, our school districts, and the lives of our students and their families. For educators, it's no longer a distant concept or future concern. It's here, in our classrooms. AI is quickly and quietly changing how students think, learn, and create, and how teachers teach. Students are using AI tools to generate ideas, translate languages, and navigate learning differences. Schools and districts are using AI-powered platforms like IXL and i-Ready for adaptive instruction and assessment. And teachers are navigating the use of AI tools, often without training, support, or time to think critically about tech's influence on their practice.

Pause and consider:

Where does AI show up in your classroom, your school, and your own daily life – both in ways you've chosen and in ways that have been chosen for you?

ABOUT THIS FIELD GUIDE

At Brown University's Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America (CSREA), we've been listening to youth, families, educators, researchers, technologists, and community advocates about what AI means for their lives and their learning. This guide is rooted in those conversations. Here you'll find accessible information about how AI works, insights from young people and the adults who support them, frameworks for thinking about AI equity and AI literacy, and practical guidance for sparking critical, compassionate discussions about AI in your classroom.

This guide is intended for formal and informal learning educators working with students ages 8 and up, though much of it may resonate across the K–20 spectrum. It is intended to meet you where you are, and help you find your path through the AI wilderness.

We hope you will use it not as a manual, but as a compass.

CSREA: PLANTING SEEDS FOR EQUITY

The Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America (CSREA) at Brown University explores how race and identity shape our lives, institutions, and world. The Center builds collaborative networks across disciplines through research, the arts, and public dialogue to foster generative conversations on pressing social issues and expand public knowledge about racial and ethnic inequality across education, technology, policy, and environment. CSREA's work is grounded in the belief that deeper understanding leads to a more just and inclusive world.



BRIDGING THE GAP: EQUITY, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

Teaching has always required adapting to change, from new standards and new technologies to new student needs and new social pressures. But the urgent pace and massive scale of AI's arrival in education is markedly different from what we've experienced before. In 2025, a White House executive order strongly encouraged the incorporation of AI into school curricula, and the Secretary of Education has since amplified the call. While compliance is not yet mandatory, the message is clear: AI in education is no longer just a consideration.

In response, states across the country have begun establishing their own AI guidelines and protocols. However, the rollouts have been uneven and the frameworks, for the most part, lack specificity. Educators are telling us they feel the gap between policy and practice acutely: the pressure to adopt tools quickly, confusion around academic integrity, limited guidance on thoughtful or equitable implementation, and uncertainty about what these new recommendations mean for the deeply human work of teaching.

Es porque un pajarito de la montaña ha hecho,
en el hueco de un árbol, su nido matinal,
que el árbol amanece con música en el pecho,
como que si tuviera corazón musical.

Si el dulce pajarito por entre el hueco asoma,
para beber rocío, para beber aroma,
el árbol de la sierra me da la sensación
de que se le ha salido, cantando, el corazón.

El nido
Alfredo Espino

There are also significant concerns about equity and access that policy alone cannot resolve. AI tools carry embedded biases and perform unevenly across languages and cultures. The distribution of AI-powered platforms and resources in schools and across districts has not been equitable and not every community is equally protected from AI's harms. At the same time, thoughtfully used AI has real potential to support differentiated instruction and open up new pathways for students who have historically been underserved by one-size-fits-all approaches to learning. This guide asks you to hold both of these truths at once.

While it doesn't replace your district's policies or state's guidelines, this field guide does offer something those documents might not: space to think, reflect, and ask hard questions. It's a resource for sitting with the tensions, the possibilities, and the responsibilities that come with AI's arrival in education. Whether your school has a detailed AI policy or none at all, this guide meets you where you are and supports you in moving forward with clarity, criticality, and care.

As an educator you are inherently part of shaping what comes next. Not just by choosing which tools to use, but by thoughtfully considering your AI boundaries, fostering honest conversations with your students and colleagues, and building the skills to navigate this landscape for yourself and your community.



WHERE ARE YOU ON THE MAP?

Before diving in, take a moment to honestly reflect on where you are right now with your AI use. Some of you may be early adopters, already using and benefiting from AI tools in your classroom. Some of you may be cautious adapters, curious but still experimenting with what feels right for your students and your practice. And some of you may be resisters. And that's okay too. Resistance is legitimate and in many cases, well-founded.

Reflect:

- What has shaped your relationship with AI so far?
- What have been your experiences, your instincts, your students' needs, and your school's expectations?
- What do you already know, and what are you still wondering?
- What excites you, and what concerns you?

There are no wrong answers here. This field guide is not here to tell you that AI is good or bad, or that you should use it more or less. We hope it will help you think more clearly, teach more critically, and make more intentional choices, for yourself, your students, and your community.

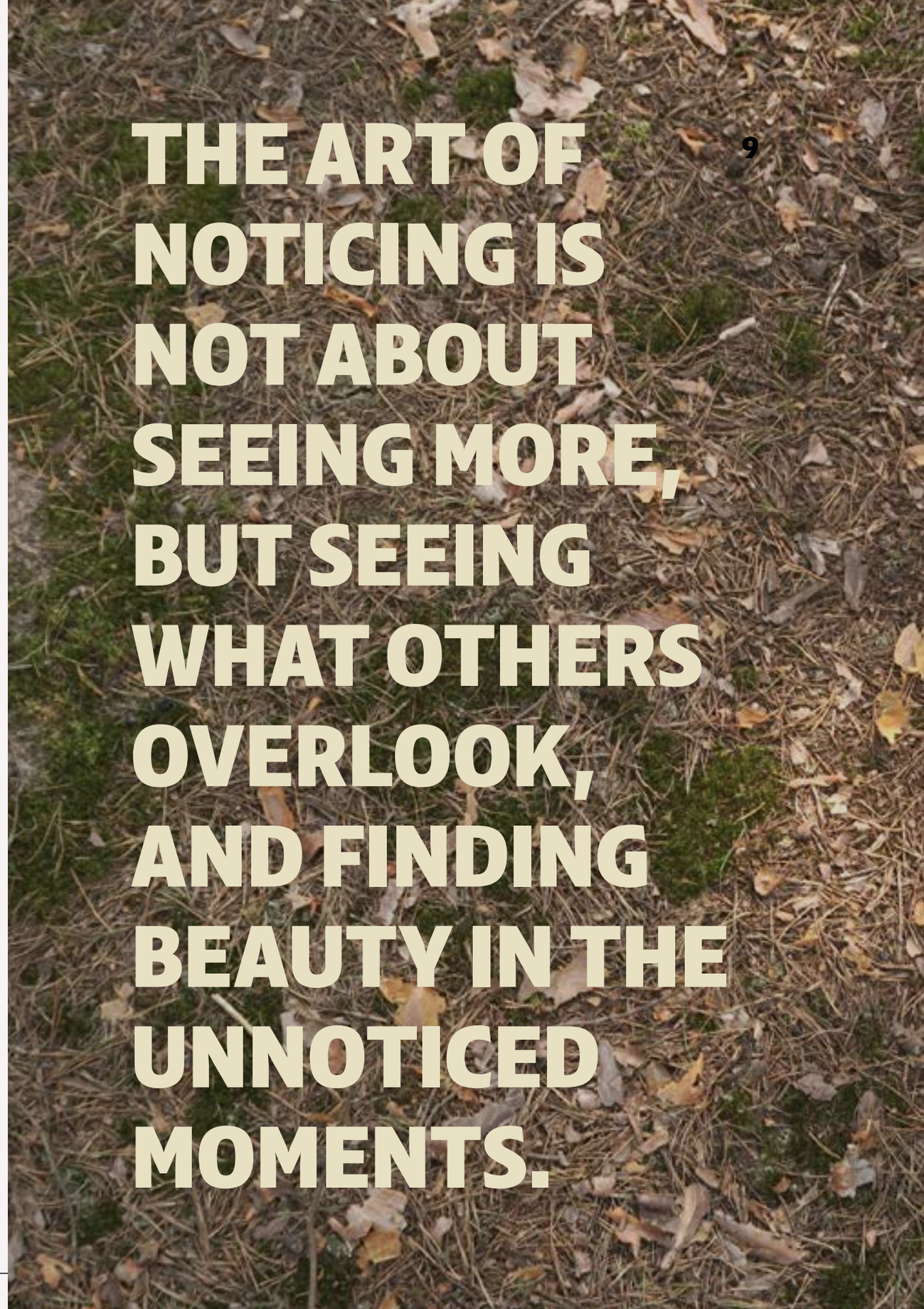
NATURAL CURIOSITIES

As AI becomes a bigger part of our everyday life and learning, you may naturally wonder how it works and what makes it different from other technologies. The youth we talked to were curious about this, too.

All AI systems require three things: data, algorithms, and processing power. Data is how AI learns; it is its teaching or training material. Data provides AI with millions of little examples, bits of complex information, and tons of images to analyze and learn from. Algorithms set AI's rules for learning; they're the instructions AI needs to follow in order to accomplish what we ask of it. It's people who decide or set AI's algorithms. Processing power refers to the computer's speed and ability to process all the data AI pulls from. Commercial AI tools use the resource-intensive processing power of computers inside data centers.

With these three things, AI can sort through huge amounts of data faster and more efficiently than humans can. It can recognize patterns that may be hard for us to find, make decisions by weighing all sorts of options, and identify and connect ideas using an almost endless knowledge bank. One of the most common types of AI is called a Large Language Model, or LLM. LLMs are the technology behind tools like Claude and ChatGPT. They're specially trained to understand and generate human language, meaning they can "read" or "listen to" your questions and "write" or "talk" back in ways that sound a lot like a person. They've learned to do this by analyzing enormous amounts of text from books, websites, and other written sources.

Some AI systems take this a step further using something called Retrieval-Augmented Generation, or RAG. RAG combines a powerful base model with a dynamic retrieval system that brings in up-to-date or domain-specific information from curated sources. It takes what LLMs come up with, cross references it with its information and resources, then adds to it to create an even richer response.



You and your learners may have other curiosities, too, like where AI came from and where it's going. Our companion guide for kids and families has additional questions you can explore through a youth-friendly lens. Use it as a partner resource to prompt classroom conversations, and/or share it with your learning community to extend this learning beyond the classroom.



THOUGHTS FROM THE FIELD

To kick off this work, we wanted to hear directly from people currently navigating AI's murky waters. We brought together middle and high schoolers, caregivers, educators and administrators, college students and professors, policy makers, and researchers and technologists for a series of community conversations. We learned that AI is undoubtedly transforming our learning landscape in both positive and negative ways. Its ability to respond and adapt to learners' needs in real time presents valuable opportunities for students' individualized learning: think on-demand support, tutoring, live captioning and translation, and customizable content. Not only that, its analytical capabilities have the potential to ease educators' administrative tasks, like lesson planning, grading, and reporting.

However, AI's advancement and implementation in the classroom gives rise to major concerns from kids, caregivers, and educators alike. These include sincere questions about ethics and equity, the lack of standardized policies, and the impact on youth's hard and soft skills, like their comprehension, critical thinking, and social-emotional development.



THE YOUTH WE TALKED WITH SHARED...

"It has no restrictions [for] people who use it for inappropriate reasons, and it can be used for cheating and other things that I don't know how to explain." - 6th Grader

"I think it can affect your learning because if some people use AI to do their work, they are not working as hard as everyone else." - 7th Grader

"We know that it is helpful, but it is also extremely dangerous in the way it is using lots of resources and affecting lots of lives. It shouldn't be something that is regularly used or overlooked when it comes to learning or life in general." - 8th Grader

"I see it a lot at my school, where people use AI to think their emotions through. The fact that you don't have cognitive thinking and being able to dissect your own emotions and you have to go to a machine to do it for you, that's kind of scary." - High Schooler





Mt. Rainier National Park in Washington, United States

THE CAREGIVERS WE TALKED WITH SHARED...

"We don't know how to support our kids [with AI]. We don't really know when is the right time to [use] it, or how to use it in the right way."

"[Kids] can spot AI videos better than I can….They're learning [about AI] one way or the other."

"My son knows about ChatGPT, and every time we're doing homework, and we don't know…as soon as he has a question, he wants to ask ChatGPT, and I'm like, 'Let's think more deeply into it'....My fear [is] that he's not thinking, or even trying to think."

[Mi hija dijo]: «En realidad, mi amigo es un robot.» ...Entonces ella dijo: «Mamá, lo que pasa es que con los humanos solo hablas un rato, pero este no tiene límites. Y responde cualquier cosa que yo quiera.»

"[My daughter said], '...my friend is actually a robot.' [Then she said], 'Mom, the thing is, with humans you can only talk for a little while, but this one has no limits. And he answers whatever I want.'"





A data center in Biggleswade, England

THE EDUCATORS WE TALKED WITH SHARED...

"AI can help us [adults], but students have to learn the basics and be able to question the information."

"Teachers are being told to use AI, but aren't being taught how. There is also a fear of what they don't know."

"There is not an even playing field [in schools]. Some have resources to work [AI] out, but others have bigger concerns they are trying to work around, like having the right number of teachers in a classroom."

"Teachers have a lot of demands on them to support students and teach. AI creates [an] added burden."

WHAT WOULD YOU SHARE?



WHEN TECHNOLOGY OUTPACES EDUCATION, INEQUALITY SOARS.

ROOTS IN UNCERTAIN SOIL

Throughout our conversations with educators and community stakeholders, one clear theme emerged: policy guidance around AI in education is inconsistent across district, state, and federal levels. This inconsistency often places responsibility squarely on the shoulders of educators to determine the who, what, why, and how of teaching with and about AI, without always having the resources and support to do so confidently.

Our goal is to change that. We want to empower you to be both an advocate for and an agent of equitable AI learning. As educators, we believe navigating the ever-evolving AI landscape calls for a "both, and" mindset, one that's grounded in criticality and optimism. You can thoughtfully question AI's limitations, biases, and risks, while also exploring how it can support your practice and your students' learning. These two standpoints are not in conflict; in fact, holding the tension of both is a mark of strong, equity-centered teaching.



CRITICAL LENS CONSIDERATIONS:

ACCESS & USAGE. AI knowledge and know-how is quickly becoming a social and economic advantage, and, without intentional interventions, has the potential to widen existing divides. At a macro level, a small number of powerful AI companies are making consequential decisions about how AI is designed, deployed, and integrated into our everyday lives, as well as how our data is being used. At the same time, large segments of society, especially those from historically marginalized communities, remain actively excluded from those conversations and AI's development.

Dr. Allison Scott, CEO of the Kapor Foundation, challenges us to consider questions that are just as relevant for school district and state leaders as for AI developers. **Who decides what AI use looks like? And who benefits from its use?** For example, AI tech used for student surveillance and behavioral monitoring is fundamentally different from tech meant to support and enhance learning. Distinguishing between the two is a critical part of equity-centered AI use. Equitable AI education is more than just access to devices and internet connectivity. It demands that all students have equal access to technology tools and infrastructure, as well as the knowledge and critical skills to understand, evaluate, and meaningfully engage with the technologies shaping their world. Consider your own educational context:

- How familiar are you with the AI tools and technologies currently used in your district or organization? How do these tools shape what and how your students learn?
- Do you believe they make your educational practice more effective and equitable? How so, and in what ways might they fall short?
- How well do these tools account for your learners' and their families' cultures, languages, socioeconomic backgrounds, disabilities, and educational experiences?

BIASES. AI is not neutral. Not even close. Because AI is trained and developed by humans, it inherits our social biases, the conscious and unconscious assumptions we carry about class, race, gender, sexuality, disability, and more. Here's what makes this especially consequential: When AI learns from biased data, it doesn't just replicate the bias, it amplifies it — making it more powerful, pervasive, and harmful than before. And algorithms carry equal culpability. Even if the data itself is neutral (e.g. age, zip code, occupation), algorithms apply biased rules. These biases are currently shaping high-stakes systems, like our bank lending practices, hiring tools, healthcare screenings, and education assessments, in ways that disproportionately harm those already marginalized.

In the classroom, data bias limits AI's ability to recognize, respond to, and support learners' range of needs and identities. Neurodivergent students, for example, are frequently overlooked by datasets trained primarily on neurotypical learners. This pattern of erasure plays out across every dimension of students' identities: race, ethnicity, culture, gender, home language, socio-economic background, and academic experience.

This is the kind of work that Data 4 Black Lives (D4BL) is confronting head-on. Founded by technologist and data scientist Yeshimabeit Milner, D4BL is an organization that challenges the ways data has historically been used to surveil, criminalize, and exclude Black and other communities of color. They reframe data not as an objective truth, but as a political act — one that can either reinforce inequality or actively dismantle it. Their framework offers a powerful model for how we might interrogate the data systems operating in our own schools and communities.



You can apply this same critical lens in your practice. Recognize that all the data that schools and districts collect about your learners carries bias. Question where that data came from, what context shaped it, and what context is missing from it. Examine how that data is influencing student access, treatment, and outcomes in your classroom. Take action, whether that means advocating for more representative and humanizing data practices in your learning environment, designing learning experiences that help students critically examine data themselves, or amplifying the voices of communities most impacted by biased systems.

Reflect on the data practices in your own educational setting:

- What kinds of data does your district, school, or organization collect about your learners — and for what stated purpose?
- How is the data being monitored, analyzed, or shared? Is it being used commercially or monetized in any way?
- What is missing from the data being collected? What aspects of your learners' identities, strengths, and experiences are being overlooked or flattened?
- In what ways might the data collected about your learners reinforce existing inequities in how they are supported, disciplined, or assessed?
- How might you involve young people and families in conversations about how their data is being used and what a more just and representative approach might look like?

PRIVACY. All AI platforms used in education settings store information about students, their identities, and their contexts. In addition to grades and birthdates, data may include family structure, attendance, behavioral records, special education status, health information, parental contacts, device identifiers, location data, and usage analytics. That's a lot of sensitive information to keep in a single system, raising legitimate concerns about privacy, safety, and security for students. Here are a few key privacy principles to explore:

- **Look into an AI platform's data practices before engaging with it.** Review each AI tool's data policies including what data is collected, how it is used, who has access, where it is stored, and whether data is shared with third parties.

- **Familiarize yourself with privacy laws and district policies.** Explore student protections, like FERPA and COPPA, and ensure platforms are compliant with district data governance rules before adopting them.

- **Be transparent and collaborative with your learning community.** Communicate clearly with students, caregivers, and administrators about which AI-powered platforms and tools you may be using, the data that's collected, and how it supports learning.

- **Take steps to protect student information.** This includes using complex passwords and enabling two-factor authentication whenever it's available.

Student privacy should be a priority for every school, district, and state using AI. If your school is exploring or actively implementing new (or existing) AI tools, consider raising these critical questions:

- What student data is this platform collecting and for what stated purpose?

- How will the data be used and stored (including retention and deletion policies)?

- What protections are in place (encryption, access controls, audit logs), and who has access to the data?

- How will students and families be informed, and how can they opt out or review their data?

- Do we have a plan in place if student data is breached? What are the potential risks or unintended consequences of a breach? Explore the Data Breach Response Checklist from the National Education Association.



CLASSROOM ETHICS. Educators are right to have concerns about AI and academic integrity. Its presence in school is sparking important questions about ethics, fairness, transparency, and accountability. However, those questions need to expand beyond, "Are my students using AI to cheat?" to consider the subtlety and complexity of a students' potential AI use. For example, when a student uses AI to write an essay, is that cheating? Now consider how many different things "using AI" could mean in this context. What if they use it to organize their ideas for that essay or translate it from their home language into English? What if they use it to help them understand the essay's prompt when it's 11pm and there's no teacher around? The line is blurry, even when it doesn't seem that way at first.

Students get the nuance, too. The middle schoolers we heard from clearly articulated the difference between using AI to help their comprehension and using it to cheat. Many expressed frustration at the lack of clear and consistent expectations around its use because they genuinely want to do what's right, but don't always have a trailmap. They're not asking for permission to cheat, they're asking for clarity, guidance, and trust. This is an invitation to reflect on what learning looks like now, what students need, and how we can meet them there.

Whether or not you are currently using AI in your classroom, establishing community expectations around AI use is an essential step. Reflect on the following questions, then explore the "Setting the Boundaries" classroom activity on page 38.

- What expectations, guidelines, or agreements have you communicated with your students about their use of AI for school work, if any? Consider both what you've communicated about their use of AI and your own, and whether those expectations feel clear, consistent, and equitable for all learners.

- How might you develop or revisit transparent, consistent guidelines around AI that both support learning and uphold academic integrity? What are ways you might involve your students in shaping or reshaping those guidelines? How can you ensure the guidelines account for the diverse needs, contexts, and identities your students bring to the classroom?



ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL IMPACT. AI uses massive amounts of energy, water, and other natural resources to run. It's no secret that our current and continued AI use will have negative environmental impacts. Energy-use, carbon emissions, air pollution, and toxic waste are all factors to keep in mind when engaging with AI. And here's the thing: We can't consider AI's ecological footprint without also considering its social implications; these two are inextricably linked. AI companies, knowing their environmental effects, often choose to build their data centers in and near Black and Latino communities. It's an intentional choice that places the direct environmental burden, risk, and impact on already disenfranchised communities of color. Think about how you can center and combat this injustice with your learners:

- If you use AI in your learning environment, how do you reflect on its environmental and social effects? Do you model or share your reflections with your learners?

- How can you help your learners critically examine the environmental and social costs of AI?

- How can you prompt your learners' sense of agency and activism around AI's impact?

REMEMBER:

Frequently remind students that no matter what they're going through, they are not alone. There are people they can lean on in school or afterschool for support, including yourself! Though it may be easier to chat with a chatbot, caring friends and adults will provide deeper, more authentic, and more responsive comfort.

HUMAN CONNECTION. Educators, caregivers, and students share a common concern: AI risks replacing real human connection. Chatbots are designed specifically to respond, connect, and relate to its users. That's precisely what makes them so appealing, and potentially problematic. Youth may begin to open up to AI instead of peers or trusted adults. And we can't necessarily blame them; it can be comforting to turn to a platform intentionally designed to always be "in your corner." The danger lies in mistaking that comfort for real human connection and relationships.

This concern isn't hypothetical. Young people are already vulnerable to tech overuse and its effects on mental health, school performance, and peer-to-peer relationships. In 2023, U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, declared youths' social media use an urgent public health issue and called on caregivers, educators, policy makers, and tech developers to take collective action to limit kids' harmful tech exposure.

These concerns also resonate globally. In 2025, Australia became the first country to ban social media for children under 16, citing growing evidence of its harm, and in 2026, the United Kingdom proposed like-minded restrictions. Similar legislative conversations are currently underway in many more countries, all actively seeking to extend tech protections for youth, particularly under 13.

In a world saturated with technology, creating intentional space for human connection is a core pedagogical responsibility. Grounding your learners in peer-to-peer care, reminding them of the trusted adults in their lives, and modeling authentic human connection are among the most powerful things you can do as an educator right now. Ask yourself:

- How do you connect with and care for your learners? How do your learners connect with and care for each other? What are the ways you encourage this connection and care?

- What are barriers to building authentic connection and care between your learners, and between you and your learners?

ASSET-BASED LENS CONSIDERATIONS:

CULTURAL PRESERVATION. There are people in our communities using AI as a light in the dark. Take Caroline and Michael Running Wolf, founders of FLAIR: First Languages AI Reality. They're using AI to help preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages. In this way, AI can be a powerful tool for cultural survival and celebration — especially for communities whose languages, stories, and ways of knowing have been continually threatened by erasure. When AI is designed and used with cultural flexibility in mind, it can adapt to different communities, languages, traditions, and ways of seeing the world, rather than only measuring gaps or deficits. Imagine one of your learners being able to hear their great-grandmother's language spoken fluently again or learning it themselves through an AI-powered tool that honors their heritage.

- Dream up what a culturally responsive AI tool would look like in your learning environment. Consider who your learners are and how it would reflect their identities, cultures, and lived experiences. What languages would it speak?
- What would it know and share?
- How would it connect to them?

INTENTIONAL & INCLUSIVE DATA TRAINING. There's potential for fairer, less biased AI outputs when training data and methods are designed with intention and care. Latimer, a generative AI platform, exemplifies this approach by prioritizing inclusivity in their training models. Rather than solely relying on what LLM models like ChatGPT generate, Latimer uses a RAG model to blend those outputs with the voices, perspectives, and stories of marginalized communities often left out of mainstream AI training data. This produces outputs that are more culturally responsive, accurate, and equitable. Reflect on what kind of impact inclusive data training would have on your learners.

Consider:

- If your learning community contributed to AI training data, what voices or perspectives would you want to ensure are included, prioritized, or highlighted?



AI LITERACY. Caregivers, educators, and community stakeholders are concerned about AI's impact on young people's skill development. Constant access to AI can lead to over-reliance and hinder kids' capacity for independent thinking. But as AI continues to evolve and becomes more inevitable and unavoidable in day-to-day life, it requires us to develop a new kind of critical capacity: AI literacy.

AI literacy is about understanding what we can do on our own, how AI can help or hurt, and how to engage with AI through a critical and equitable lens. It takes ideation, evaluation, problem-solving, persistence, and reflection. It means asking questions like: Do I need AI for this? How is it helping me? Is what AI's telling me actually true? How can I get clearer, more accurate responses? Where is AI getting this information? What might a human being know that a computer wouldn't? Could I do this on my own next time?

As you think about your own practice, consider how you might deepen your learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills in an age of AI.

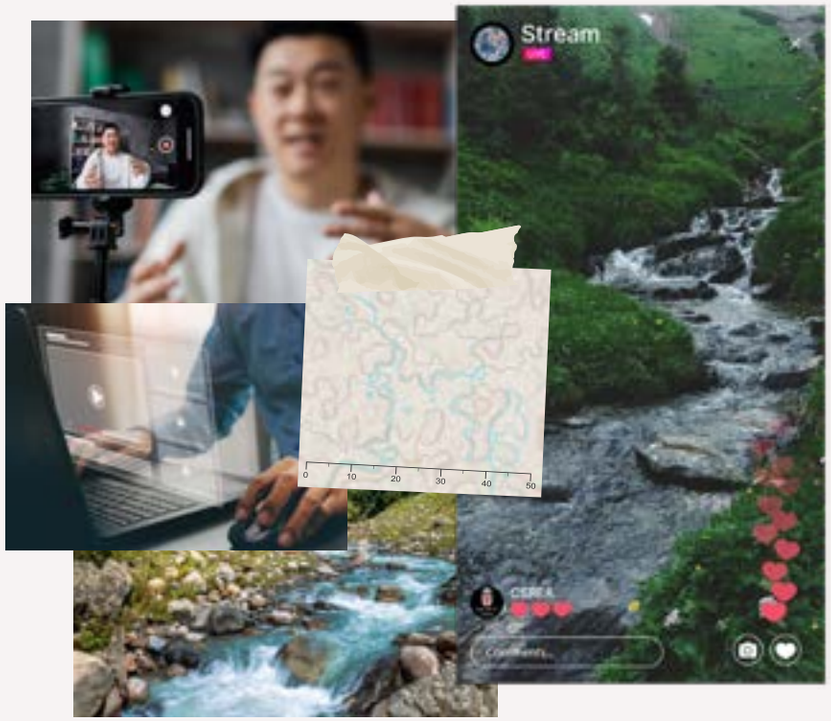
Reflect on the following:

- In what ways might you shift your pedagogical approach to challenge learners to think independently and problem-solve, even when they are using AI?
- How can you encourage your learners to be critical consumers of information? How can you help them build a critical and equitable lens when it comes to AI?

Culturally flexible AI literacy is the ability to adapt, discern, and consciously negotiate between human and machine output. It prioritizes divergent thinking — fluency, flexibility, individuality, and originality — over AI's convergent thinking, and involves evaluating AI through a critical and equitable lens.

It includes knowing:

- What you can do on your own or with other people and what you can use AI's help with.
- That you need to use your own thinking, creativity, and judgement.
- How to prompt AI to get the most accurate and helpful responses, and how to ask follow up questions.
- Ways to review or check AI's answers for accuracy.
- How to be a responsible AI user by making sure you are using AI in ways that align line with your values.



NURTURING AI LITERACY

Like all skills, practice makes progress. Incorporating AI literacy into your curriculum will ensure your learners begin to develop the critical skills needed to engage with AI now and in the future. Here is a list of helpful resources to get you started thinking about AI literacy in the classroom:

AI LITERACY: A FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND, EVALUATE, AND USE EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES
Digital Promise

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES
Common Sense Media

K-12 AI CURRICULA
UNESCO

THE 4 C'S OF AI LITERACY: BUILDING A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
School AI

AI FOR SOCIAL GOOD
Technology, Communities, Social Change

RESPONSIBLE AI AND TECH JUSTICE: A GUIDE FOR K-12 EDUCATION
Kapor Foundation



TRAILMARKERS FOR THE SCHOOL YEAR AHEAD

The biggest takeaway from our conversations with youth, caregivers, and educators is simple: we need to talk more! No matter our age, stage, or role, AI is showing up in our learning environments, and in everyday life. And we're all figuring it out together. Having open and honest conversations about AI — its possibilities, its limitations, and its risks — will help us become more empowered users of it.

In the classroom, this means creating opportunities for safe, exploratory conversations where curiosity is welcomed and questions abound. Consider incorporating the following mini-unit into your curriculum in the first few months of school to establish a classroom culture rooted in trust and shared responsibility, especially around AI use.



PREPARE FOR YOUR AI EXPEDITION: CONVERSATION COMMITMENTS

Before embarking on AI conversations with your learners, establish some ways you will engage in respectful, generative discussions together. Use this activity to establish conversation commitments, a set of classroom agreements you all make to keep the conversations open, honest, and safe.

PREP: Start with a little self-reflection. Ask yourself:

- How can I help my learners feel safe and comfortable in talking with me about their AI use? What can I do to support their honesty?
- What concerns or fears do I have about AI use, for myself and for my learners?
- How will my current thoughts, opinions, and biases about AI show up in our conversations?
- What are ways I can model curiosity about what they're sharing? How will I withhold my judgment?

You don't need to be an AI expert to spark these kinds of conversations with your learners. Not knowing offers you an opportunity for you to learn alongside them. Frame discussions as shared learning experience; this open-ended, exploratory approach will help learners feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and questions with you.



MATERIALS: Chart paper and something to write with, or this printable template you can fill in and build on with your learners.

INTRO & DISCUSSION: Share that you'd like to have on-going conversations about AI with your learners and be honest about why it's important. Say something like, "Over the next few weeks, we're going to explore and talk about AI and how it shows up in our everyday lives and our learning. AI's constantly advancing and evolving, which can make it hard to understand. Many of us, me included, are trying to figure out how and when to use it. Talking about it will help us learn. As we get the conversation going, I'd like us to think about ways we can make our conversations about AI respectful and helpful for all. Think of them as conversation commitments, or a type of community agreement. What are things we can commit to that will help keep our conversations open, honest, and safe?" Then, share and discuss a few examples:

- **Be transparent and truthful.** There can be some uncertainty, discomfort, or even shame around using AI. Keeping lines of communication open will help build feelings of trust and comfort.

- **Take turns.** A lot of times classroom conversations can feel one-sided, with the teacher taking the lead. Making sure everyone has time to talk and listen will help all learners feel heard and respected.

- **Explore and learn together.** No one needs to be an expert on AI-use! Not knowing offers us an opportunity to learn together.

Ask your learners: "Do these commitments feel relatable, applicable, and something we can all agree to? Is there anything you want to change? Is there anything you want to add?" Invite them to brainstorm 3-5 more conversation commitments. This may sound like, "What are some other ways we can commit to showing care in these conversations?" Allow time for individual reflection, small group discussion, and full-class sharing. As themes emerge, add them to the chart paper or printed template. Once finished, hang the commitments somewhere visible in the classroom and refer back to them throughout all your AI-related discussions.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: Spark your first conversation about AI. Aim for open-ended questions that avoid implying judgment. For example:

- What comes to mind when you think about AI?

- What are some ways you use AI in your everyday life? What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?

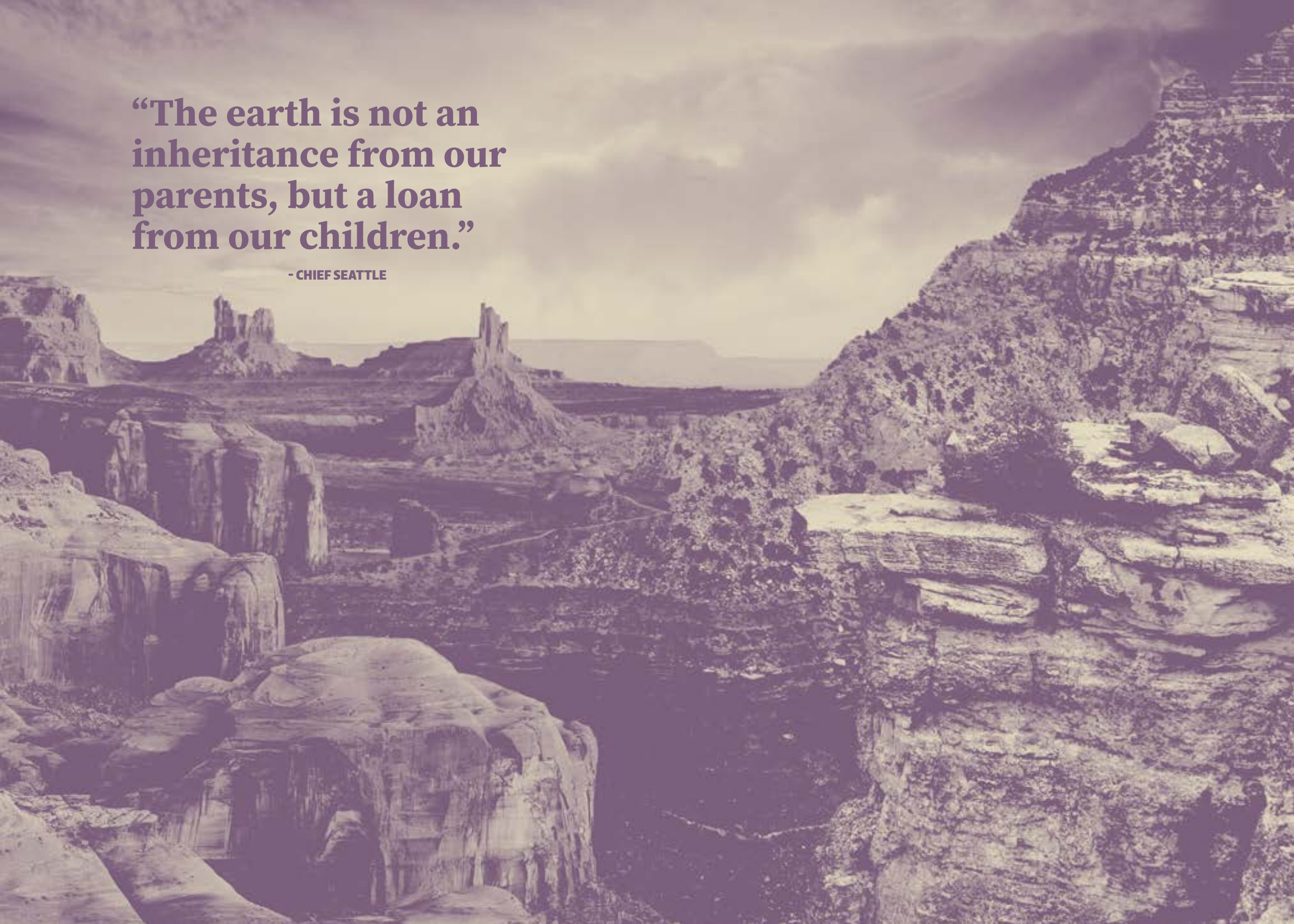
- How does AI impact you or your classmates' learning? What are ways it helps your learning? What are ways it hinders your learning?

- What would you like me and your other educators to know or understand about AI?

- What kind of boundaries or rules, if any, should we make around AI use in our classroom? When is it okay to use AI? When is it not okay?

Throughout your discussion, take time to call-back to or point-out moments related to your conversation commitments. This may sound like, "I know we've all got lots to share, but remember, our commitment to turn-taking. Does anyone who hasn't spoken yet want to share their thoughts?"

Remember, these discussions should be on-going! AI is constantly evolving, and so are the ways we're using it. Come back to conversations around AI regularly and often.



“The earth is not an inheritance from our parents, but a loan from our children.”

- CHIEF SEATTLE



SETTING THE BOUNDARIES: AI IN THE CLASSROOM

Use the start of the school year to establish clear, manageable expectations, or guidelines, around AI use with your learners. These can be thought of as AI parameters for the classroom. Together, as a class, draft a pact that outlines how you will all use AI in the class environment; for creating, learning, teaching, or playing. This activity will encourage transparency around AI use and outline boundaries for everyone to follow — including you! It is all about creating shared understanding and accountability around AI that each of you can commit to.

PREP: First, reflect on the ways you may or may not be using AI as an educator. Ask yourself:

- In what, if any, ways am I using AI to support my educational practice?
- Am I open and transparent with my learners if/when I use AI in my planning, grading, or classroom communication??
- What rules or expectations do I hold for myself around AI use? What do I expect from my learners? How are they similar or different?
- How can I ensure the expectations I hold for my learners feel supportive, not punitive? What is the difference?

MATERIALS: This "Our AI Boundaries" template is available for you to explore, edit, or print. You can use it as your own, or as inspiration for developing your own "boundaries" document. It may also be helpful to have chart paper, a chalkboard, a digital whiteboard, or sticky notes for group brainstorming.

Educators are responsible for modeling healthy and appropriate tech use, which includes clearly communicating how and when we use AI in the classroom. And this kind of transparency will help build trust, not break it!

INTRO & DISCUSSION: Explain to your learners that we all have different comfort levels with AI and expectations about its use. Try something like, "We all have different ideas about when, where, how, and we should use AI, and that's okay. But as it becomes a more common part of our lives, especially at school and in our learning, we need to be on the same page. Today, we're going to decide together when and what AI should be used for in our classroom." Then share that you'll be drafting clear AI guidelines you'll all commit to. For example, "We're going to be brainstorming guidelines for how we'll use AI in our work. It'll be like a contract, something we all sign and commit to, myself included."

Start with a group brainstorm similar to the one you did in your prep. Ask your learners how and when they use AI in their learning and at school and how they've seen their peers and teachers use it. Emphasize that this is a safe conversation, and encourage them to be honest. Solidify this by sharing some of the ways you've used AI in your work, especially in ways you've felt unsure about and why. It might be helpful to refer back to the conversation commitments you created together. If your learners feel uncomfortable sharing their thoughts aloud, offer them sticky notes to write their answers down anonymously.

Jot down your own and your learners' contributions. Start to dig deeper with questions like:

- When is AI helpful for learning? When does it hinder learning?
- When does AI feel unfair?
- How can AI be a resource instead of a replacement for our own thinking?

If it didn't come up naturally, note that there can be a lot of nuance in the ways we use AI in school and work; it isn't always black and white. Are there any situations that you discussed that need further consideration?

Here are a few scenarios to explore:

1. A learner is nervous about participating in class discussions and starts using AI to help them think through responses before speaking so they can feel more confident.
2. A learner uploads notes they took in class into AI to generate summaries and study questions.
3. During a class discussion, the teacher quickly uses AI to double check an answer before responding to a student.
4. A teacher uploads a self-written lesson plan to AI and asks it to generate aligned activities.
5. A learner writes an essay in their home language and uses AI to translate it into English.

Brainstorm a few additional scenarios to prompt discussion:



PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: Together, reflect on all that was shared. What kinds of AI use felt okay to them? What kinds felt unfair? What felt uncertain? Ask your learners to help you sort their thinking into three categories: "Fair Game," meaning the use of AI feels fitting or acceptable, "Crossing the Line," meaning it feels like too much or unacceptable, and, "Investigate Further," for the ideas without a clear, definitive answer. Write each category on the board or chart paper and document your learners' corresponding responses. This will be the basis for your class' AI boundaries document.

On your own, take what you learned from students and create, add to, or edit the "AI Boundaries" document. Bring it back to them in the following days to review. Is there anything they'd like to change? Is there anything missing? Consider how you will all hold each other accountable to this agreement. What happens when someone makes a mistake? What if a new or unfamiliar situation pops up? Spark conversation around the "Investigate Further" category. Together, decide what someone should do if they find themselves in one of those situations. How will they learn more? Who will they go to for support?

Once finalized, invite everyone — including yourself — to sign it. Ensure each student has a copy for themselves, and one to bring home to keep their caregivers in the loop. Emphasize to your learners that their AI boundaries lists should be revisited throughout the year, as you learn more about AI and continue to consider its uses.



Once, in the cool blue of a lake,
up to my neck in that most precious element of all,

I found a pale-gray, curled-upwards pigeon feather
floating on the tension of the water

at the very instant when a dragonfly,
like a blue-green iridescent bobby pin,

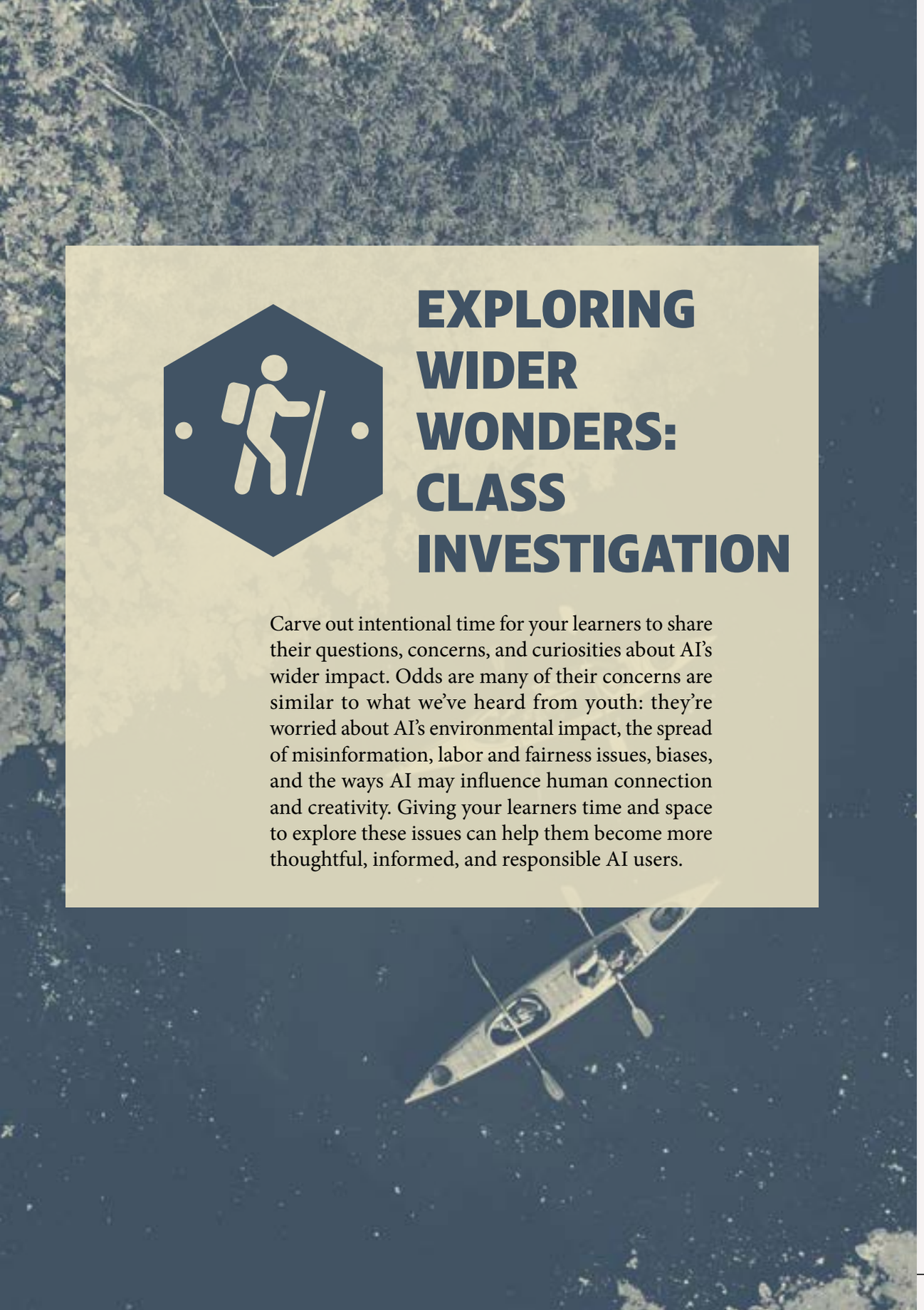
hovered over it, then lit, and rested.
That's all.

I mention this in the same way
that I fold the corner of a page

in certain library books,
so that the next reader will know

where to look for the good parts.

Field Guide
Tony Hoagland



EXPLORING WIDER WONDERS: CLASS INVESTIGATION

Carve out intentional time for your learners to share their questions, concerns, and curiosities about AI's wider impact. Odds are many of their concerns are similar to what we've heard from youth: they're worried about AI's environmental impact, the spread of misinformation, labor and fairness issues, biases, and the ways AI may influence human connection and creativity. Giving your learners time and space to explore these issues can help them become more thoughtful, informed, and responsible AI users.

PREP: You'll be the facilitator for this activity and your ultimate goal is to guide learners toward their own discoveries. However, we know it's not always easy to keep your own experiences, prior knowledge, and opinions from the conversation. That's okay. Reflecting on your thoughts ahead of time can help you approach the discussion more clearly and less biased. Reflect on:

- What beliefs do I personally hold about AI's broader impact?
- Where does my knowledge about AI come from?
- How can I help learners investigate their questions critically without leading them toward one "correct" perspective?



MATERIALS: This is a big topic, with lots of information to sort through! Provide your learners with reliable resources they can trust as they answer questions. Think: journal articles, credible news sources, government databases, and university research websites. The reference list at the end of this guide is a good place to start!

INTRO & DISCUSSION: Start this activity by highlighting that AI's impacts run deep, often in ways we don't even think or know about. Say something like, "When people talk about AI, a lot of the time the conversation focuses on productivity or technology. But it's important to consider the overarching impact it has on us, our communities, and our planet. Today, we're going to explore some of our bigger questions about AI."

Invite learners to share their concerns or questions about AI. Encourage all kinds of responses: practical, emotional, ethical, or even uncertain ones. To spark their ideation, you might ask:

- What excites you about AI?
- What worries you about AI?
- Who do you think benefits most from AI right now?
- Who might be negatively impacted by AI?

As themes emerge, give space for learners to share what they already know or what they think they know.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: Give your learners a clear, dedicated, and extended amount of time to investigate their questions more deeply. If additional support or direction is needed, break them up into pairs or small groups and assign them an investigatory theme:

Environmental Impact. Have learners consider questions such as:

- What kinds of natural resources does AI need to function? How much does it use?
- What's its environmental impact?
- In what ways does AI's resource usage impact you, your family, and your community?
- As AI continues to grow, what potential impact could it have on you, your family, and your community?
- What communities are being affected most by AI's impact? In what ways?
- Why do you think this is happening?

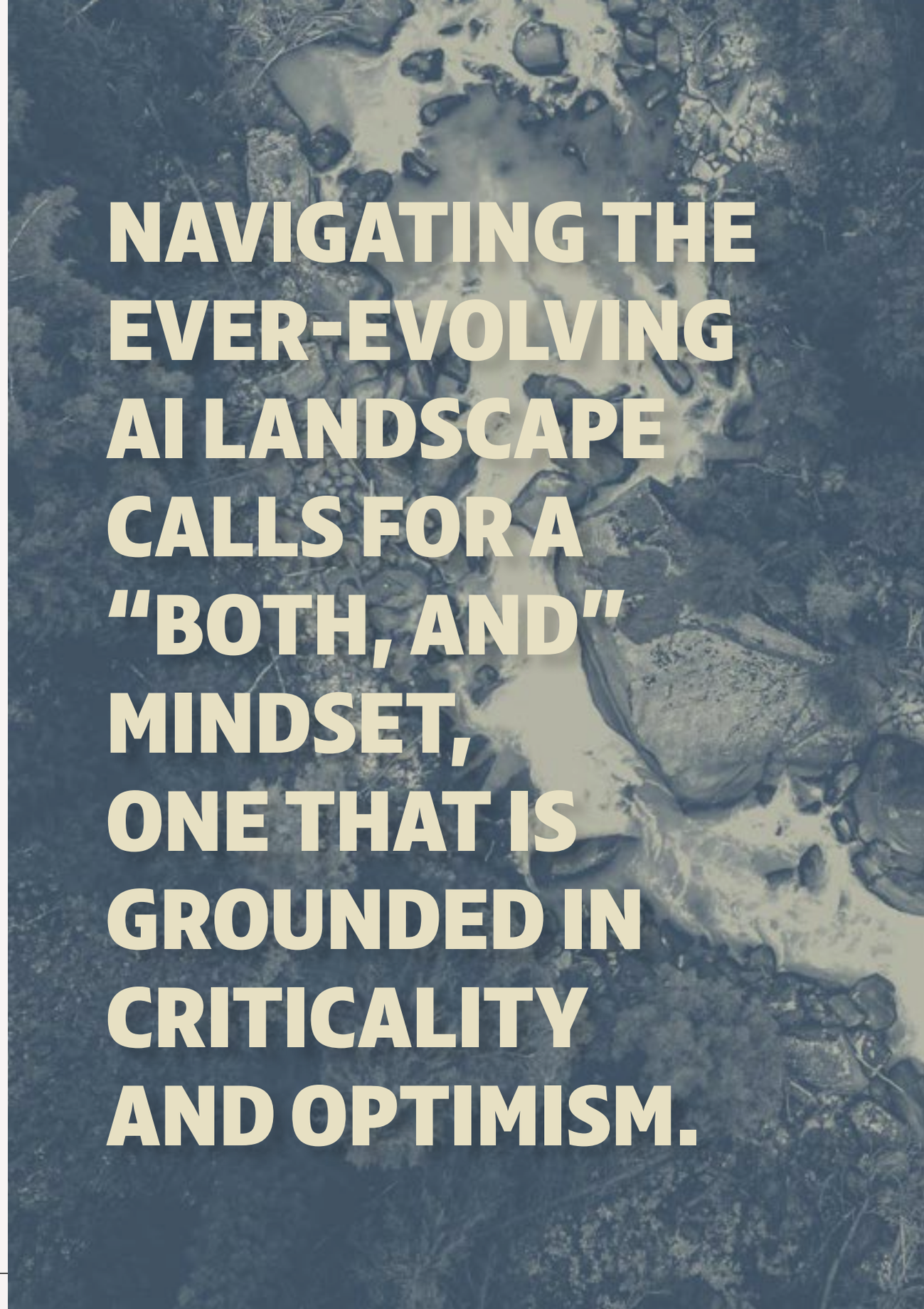
Accountability. Have learners consider questions such as:

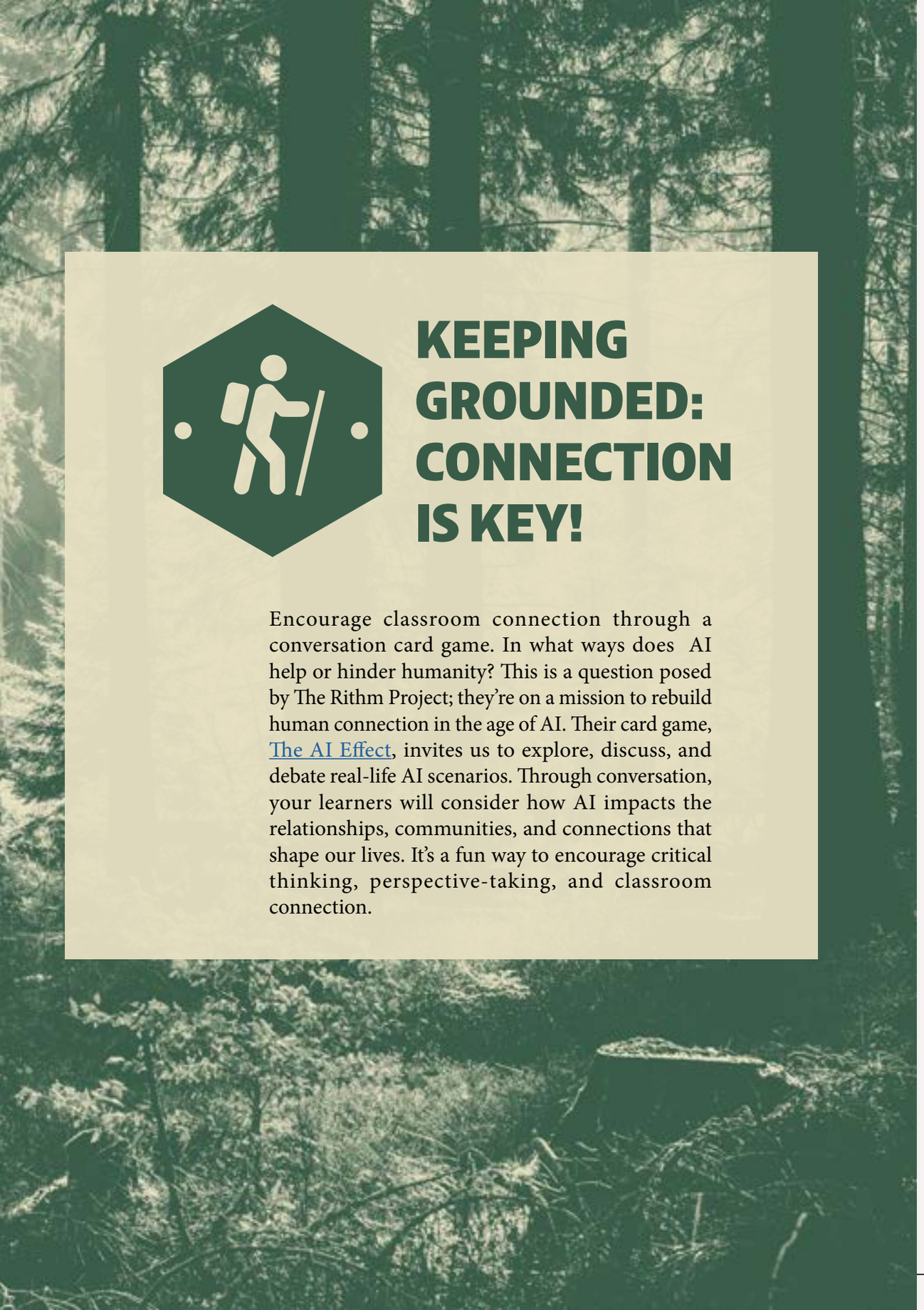
- What role should AI companies play in minimizing the harmful impacts of AI?
- Who should hold AI companies accountable? Individual users? Schools? Communities? Governments? What should that accountability look like?
- What role can you and your classmates play in minimizing the harmful impacts of AI?

Biases in Data. Have your learners consider questions such as:

- Where does AI get its information from? Who trains AI and how?
- How does AI develop human biases? What kinds of human biases does AI contribute to or perpetuate?
- Where do these biases show up in our communities? Who do they affect and how?
- What are ways companies can actively counter AI's biases?
- In what ways should individuals consider these biases as they interact with AI?

Have each group or individual briefly present what they learned with the rest of the class. As they do, note the complexity of these questions and issues. Using AI involves tradeoffs, disagreements, and unanswered questions. The goal of this exploration is not necessarily to reach consensus, but to practice thoughtful inquiry and responsible discussion.





KEEPING GROUNDED: CONNECTION IS KEY!

Encourage classroom connection through a conversation card game. In what ways does AI help or hinder humanity? This is a question posed by The Rithm Project; they're on a mission to rebuild human connection in the age of AI. Their card game, The AI Effect, invites us to explore, discuss, and debate real-life AI scenarios. Through conversation, your learners will consider how AI impacts the relationships, communities, and connections that shape our lives. It's a fun way to encourage critical thinking, perspective-taking, and classroom connection.

PREP: Explore the Rithm Project's work, and consider the ways you may already be noticing the effects of AI on human connection in your learning environment. Ask yourself:

- What does human connection look like among my learners?
- In what ways could technology support or challenge my learners in building relationships?

The goal of this game isn't to determine whether AI is good or bad; it is an opportunity to reflect on AI's ability to strengthen or change real-life relationships. It may, however, spark some natural disagreements. With these types of nuanced conversations, consider calling back to your class' conversation commitments.



MATERIALS: A deck of AI Effect cards, which are available for donation-based order on their website. Alternatively, there are specific scenarios from the card deck included in the below.

INTRO & DISCUSSION: Begin by reviewing what you have already covered and discovered throughout this mini-unit. Together, you've explored how AI shows up in your learning and in the wider world. Highlight the importance of human relationships in the age of AI. Say something like, "We've talked about how AI affects our learning, and the world around us. Today, we're going to talk about AI's impact on human connection. The big question we'll explore: "**What are ways AI can help or hinder humanity?"**

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE: Get playing and conversing. Break your learners up into pairs or small groups and provide them with some scenarios from the cards, the prompts below, or ones you come up with on your own. Ask them to work together to decide if each scenario supports human connection, erodes it, or if it depends, and why. Encourage them to jot down their thinking and remind them that not everyone has to agree. This is an activity intended to inspire conversation and perspective-taking!

Scenario Prompts:

1. Using AI to translate a message for someone who speaks another language.
2. Generating an AI-created apology to a friend after a fight.
3. Engaging in AI-simulations that help you experience the world from someone else's perspective.
4. Asking an AI chatbot for advice on dealing with feelings of loneliness.
5. Generating AI bedtime stories for a younger sibling, using personal information about your family to customize them.
6. Making an AI version of your favorite movie/book/tv character to chat with when you are bored.



After your learners have had enough time to discuss their scenarios, invite them to share their answers, thought processes, and disagreements. Then ask:

- What surprised you during these discussions?
- Were there any scenarios that felt especially complicated? How so?
- Did anyone's thoughts or opinions change about a scenario after hearing someone else's ideas?
- Do you feel more connected to your peers after a game like this? In what ways?
- What kinds of human connection do you think technology can never replace?



The future of AI is still being written, and as an educator you have more power in that story than you might think. Dylan Baker, lead research engineer with the Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR), challenges and invites us to imagine otherwise. They remind us that the version of AI we have today is not the only version possible. There are alternative futures — ones with more joy, more justice, and more human connection — that we get to build. It starts with asking ourselves what we actually want from AI, for our learners, our communities, and our world.

Pause and consider:

What good things are possible with AI? How can AI be used for good? And how can our students be part of that good?

Empower your learners: Remind them their imagination is not a small thing. It is one of the most powerful tools they have. Encourage them to dream up the world they want to live in. Then start exploring how to build it together.

Be empowered as their educator: Stay curious alongside the young people in your life. Ask questions together. Resist together. And remind each other that collective power — people organizing, advocating, and imagining together — has always been how change gets made.

The future of AI isn't something that will happen to us. It's something we can grow together.

APPENDIX



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

AI COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHERS
UNESCO

AI GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS TOOLKIT
TEACH AI

BUILDING AN AI CLASSROOM POLICY WITH STUDENTS
KRAUSE CENTER FOR INNOVATION

CONVERSATION KIT: YOUTH, AI, AND THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT SHAPE THEM
THE RITHM PROJECT

EDUCATOR COURSES AND RESOURCES
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF AI INSTRUCTION

RESPONSIBLE AI FOR SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION (RAISE): RESOURCES AND TOOLS
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

STUDENT AND EDUCATOR DATA PRIVACY: TIPS
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

VOCABULARY

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI): Technology that can perform tasks that usually require human thinking, like understanding language, recognizing images, answering complex questions, and making decisions.

AI LITERACY: The learned skill of understanding, using, and thinking critically about AI. This practice includes recognizing what AI can and can't do in order to make informed choices about when to use it, and when to trust it.

ALGORITHM: The human-designed instructions AI uses to process information and produce a result. Algorithms take inputs (like questions, information, or data) and run them through a series of steps to generate outputs (like answers, recommendations, or actions).

CHATBOT: A program designed to simulate text- or voice-based conversation (see Large Language Model).

DATA CENTERS: Large buildings filled with the powerful computers that store and process the data behind websites, apps, and other AI systems. These centers have a significant environmental impact due to huge amounts of electricity required to run, and huge amounts of water to regulate the heat from that electricity.

DEEPFAKE: A video, photo, or audio recording of a real person created or changed by AI to make it appear like they are saying or doing something they never did. Deepfakes can be hard to spot, so it's always a good idea to double-check what you see online before believing or sharing it.

HALLUCINATION: When an AI produces responses that are inaccurate, misleading, or completely untrue. AI might give you information that looks like what it's seen before and what it "thinks" you want, even if that information is false. Always double-check information provided to you by an AI by comparing it with human-created sources.

LARGE LANGUAGE MODEL (LLM): A type of AI that has been trained on huge amounts of written text, like books, articles, and websites, so that it can understand questions and generate responses that sound natural and human. ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude are all examples of LLMs. The "large" refers to both the size of the training data and the complexity of the model itself.

PRIVACY (ONLINE): How your personal data is collected and used on the internet. In AI, privacy matters because these systems rely on data, which includes any information or behaviors online. Understanding privacy helps you make more informed choices about what you share and how your information may be used.

PROMPT: The instructions or input you give to an AI system. A prompt can be a question, request, or statement that tells the AI what you want it to do. AI combines human-generated prompts with human-designed algorithms to generate a response based on the information it has learned.

RETRIEVAL-AUGMENTED GENERATION (RAG): A method that gives AI the ability to search for and pull in new, outside information while it's responding to you, rather than relying only on what it learned during training. RAG helps AI give answers that are more current and more accurate.

APPENDIX

AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FIELD GUIDE

THANK YOU

DISTRIBUTED AI RESEARCH INSTITUTE (DAIR)
Grounding AI Research in Community
FIRST LANGUAGES AI REALITY (FLAIR)
Enabling the Revitalization of Indigenous Language with AI and Immersive Technology
LATIMER
AI for Everyone
STEAM BOX
Empowering Youth Through Hands-on STEAM Programming
THE RITHM PROJECT
Building Human Connection in the Age of AI

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IBM

In creating this field guide, we used AI as a tool to create activity elements using ChatGPT and Latimer and prompted informational searches and resources discovery using Claude.

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APPENDIX

AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FIELD GUIDE

FIELD NOTES





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