



VOICES

The Newsletter of the Touchstones® Discussion Project

FUNDING THE FUTURE

*by: Debra Valentine, Board Chair, and Kurt Redfield, Board Treasurer
Endowment Fund Co-Chairs*

When Geoff Comber, Nick Maistrellis and Howard Zeiderman started the Touchstones Project over 38 years ago, they had no idea it would reach over five million students of all ages in 47 countries and six languages. Their vision was simple: to transform education from passive to active learning and to ensure that all students acquired the essential skills needed for success in school, life, and work.

To achieve this goal they developed an entirely new pedagogy—one that yields active listening and collaboration among all students, regardless of age or background. Using specially curated texts and extensive teacher training, Touchstones has built capacity and insured a long-lasting impact in many schools around the world. The texts and Leader's Guide are also used in multiple contexts outside schools – with veterans' groups, seniors, incarcerated persons and local community groups.

But to continue growing our reach, which is so important for developing civil discourse and collaboration skills in various venues, we need to build capacity in our own organization. To do so, we have launched an important initiative: to raise \$5 million for the Touchstones Endowment Fund. We believe that the best way to acknowledge the tremendous achievements of the Founders is to ensure that Touchstones thrives and grows in perpetuity. Modest annual dividends from the Fund will enable the needed organizational growth that is outlined in our new four-year strategic plan.

We have already secured \$1.8 million from supporters, and with your help we are sure we will reach our goal. It has never been more critical to develop the skills of respectful listening and considered thinking in our rapidly changing world. By supporting Touchstones you will help nurture our shared belief in a free society that recognizes and includes all viewpoints. Please join us and make this possible.

Through inclusive discussion-based programming, Touchstones develops highly effective speakers, listeners, critical thinkers, and collaborative leaders.

***It has never been more critical to develop
the skills of respectful listening and considered thinking
in our rapidly changing world.***

TRUST THE TEACHERS & STUDENTS

by: Howard Zeiderman, Director of Leadership Programs

Touchstones teaches every participant to listen actively and speak in ways that are responsive to what others have said or asked. So it is more than symbolic when a large new university program starts at the recommendation of a former high school teacher who is now a graduate student.

This spring, Nathan Slife and Chelsie Hawkinson, two professors in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), sought to revamp the college's freshman and sophomore seminar courses. When they tapped a graduate assistant to help, she suggested Touchstones, which will 'teach students to think and to work together.'

After initial calls with our staff and reviewing various Touchstones Leader's Guides, they were eager to pilot Mapping the Future with sophomores over the summer. I offered to provide coaching each week, so they had support throughout their pilot. Nathan led the program while Chelsie observed the class and assessed student engagement and behaviors related to inclusive dialog, critical thinking, and collaboration. She examined what worked well for the students and why.

Twice weekly, we met on Zoom, to share information. Initially, Nathan and Chelsie focused on how Touchstones enhances thinking skills. But they also want their students to be leaders.

With those goals in mind, we discussed how early students could assume leadership roles. Typically, students begin leading Touchstones discussions after significant experience—about 12-15 lessons through a volume. We negotiated and compromised, setting up a plan for students to lead a discussion after only a few classes. Taking a chance like this required us to step well

beyond our experiences, and it worked! The students and their professors loved how quickly and earnestly the students assumed responsibility: teaching and learning together.

This fall, 400 more sophomores and 18 faculty are stepping into this new seminar program under Nathan's coordination. Chelsie and a dozen faculty (some who are also teaching the sophomore course) are also leading the First Year Seminar course with 200

freshmen, with Touchstones' community service volume *Courage to Care, Strength to Serve* as their textbook.

"In our first few weeks of leading Touchstones discussions," Chelsie wrote recently, "We can already see the ways that this method invites even the most introverted students into the heart of the discussion. It's an easy program to be passionate about and we are so thankful to be part of the Touchstones community."



A teacher professional development workshop that took place at Columbia Secondary School for Math, Science and Engineering, New York City.

In this photo, teachers are in small group sessions. Small group work is part of the Touchstones discussion and provides a safer space for sharing ideas, and helps participants practice collaborative learning.

NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT OUR SCHOOL PARTNERS

by: Brittany Usiak, K-12 & Adult Programs Manager

Over the decades, tens of thousands of educators have received Touchstones training or purchased our volumes for their students. Some have colleagues also using Touchstones in their schools or districts, but many are the only person they know implementing the program. Time and again, we've heard how educators value the opportunity to connect with others in a Touchstones setting; they want more opportunities to do so. In response this school year, we're intentionally offering a variety of new ways for everyone in the global Touchstones educator community to connect (or reconnect!) with us, hone their skills as discussion leaders, share strategies and ideas for the classroom, and build relationships with each other.

What does this look like in practice? In addition to the Touchstones Teacher Community group we launched earlier this year and launching another run of our successful Touchstones Fellows program this fall, we're rolling out new initiatives to support schools and teachers. One of these is a discussion series for educators called "Exploring the Four Stages of Inclusive Discussion" beginning September 28. These sessions will include a Touchstones discussion, strategies that support students' development in each stage, and time for networking. We are also offering a suite of new digital tools for measuring success. These include individual evaluation tools to track students' growth in active listening, responsive speaking, critical and reflective thinking, and cooperative learning—some of our Essential Skills. We're also piloting a family engagement program that uses Touchstones

TOUCHSTONES WEEK

Civil discourse is one of the most important set of skills for citizens in a democracy. At Touchstones, we believe that building mutual understanding through discussion will help us solve our world's most pressing problems together. To support people around the globe in strengthening these skills while building relationships, we're bringing back Touchstones Week from October 23 – 29, 2022!

How it Works

Sign up to participate on our website

•

We'll email you a Touchstones Week Kit with everything you need to facilitate a discussion.

•

Bring together a group of students in your classroom or participants in your community – anyone can participate!

•

During Touchstones Week, share your stories, photos, and videos with us on social media using #TouchstonesWeek2022 or via email.

discussions to build trust and connection across the entire school community.

A central part of my role as K-12 Programs Manager is to be responsive to teachers' needs, so they can foster the greatest growth in their students. I'm excited to see how these new offerings strengthen the Touchstones community this year and look forward to having many of you join us. Check out the Touchstones blog on our website for more details!

Gifts of Stock & Securities & IRA QCDs

Touchstones accepts gifts of appreciated stocks and other securities through our Raymond James investment account. If you are 70 1/2 or older, you may wish to make a gift to Touchstones from your IRA as a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). Check with your tax advisor to make sure you're taking full advantage of those charitable gift opportunities.

visit [touchstones.org](https://www.touchstones.org) and click community programs or www.touchstones.org/portfolio-items/touchstones-week



TOUCHSTONES: MASTERING THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

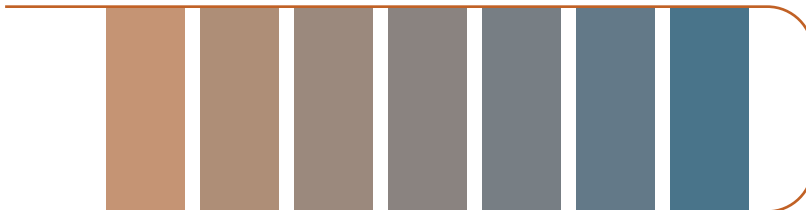
by: Stacey Turner, Graphic Artist



Touchstones Discussion Project is an organization that brings great benefit to those they serve and they are always striving to do more. As graphic designer, it is my pleasure to assist Touchstones to engage more fully with their loyal followers, attract new participants and supporters, and simply make the world a more inclusive, informed and respectful place—one thoughtful discussion at a time. My contribution to this important mission is to visually represent Touchstones in a way that invites every person to learn more and become engaged. To this end, there have been some creative updates that center around what Touchstones has always been and all it can become.

The original color palette has had some additions and subtle alterations. While honoring the original and recognizable deep red and gray blue, we have added a hierarchy of subordinate colors that can be used across different outlets and tailored to appeal to various markets.

The newsletter layout, with its new centered orientation, was redesigned to reflect the stability and balance found in a Touchstones discussion, while also hinting at the true north that a compass provides. Increasing the white, open space in the layout, especially on the front page, is intended as an invitation for the reader to open up to more detailed information found inside the newsletter. In today's world, print material such as the Touchstones newsletter is still a powerful tool—one that can be used to share related information on other websites through collaborative links and QR codes. Finally, the black outline treatment in the outer margins is intended to evoke a sense of modernity. In a time when many get their information from a screen, Touchstones is conscious of the important and quickly expanding world of data and technology.



All the elements of this new branding style are purposefully designed to be easily adaptable for the varied categories of people and institutions with relationships to Touchstones. From educators in schools who spend their days surrounded by children, to CEOs managing teams of professionals, the new Touchstones visual language honors and appeals to all audiences. Each of the updated graphics and their applications are designed as effective communication tools with the hopes of opening doors, inviting new people in, and spreading the many gifts that the Touchstones Discussion Project offers the world.

2022 BOARD of DIRECTORS

Debra Valentine
Chair

Gregg Steinberg
Vice Chair

Greg Hodges
Secretary

Kurt Redfield
Treasurer

Laurie de Grazia
Garreth Heidt
Nicholas Maistrellis
Noelle Richmond
Ford Rowan
Howard Zeiderman

For questions or if you want to make a gift:

call us at 410-604-3309,
visit touchstones.org/donate,
or email info@touchstones.org



scan to donate
through our site
touchstones.org



scan to donate
through **venmo**
[@touchstonesdiscussions](https://venmo.com/touchstonesdiscussions)

*Every gift makes a difference,
please give generously today.
If you have already made a
contribution to Touchstones this
year, thank you!*



Touchstones Discussion Project



@TouchstonesEd



touchstonesdiscussions



Touchstones Discussion Project

Touchstones® is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization to which donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.
With your charitable support, we deliver discussion-based education training and programming when no other funding is available—
in schools, community groups, and prisons. For a copy of our financial statements, contact us at 143 Log Canoe Circle, Stevensville, MD 21666 or
PO Box 2329, Annapolis, MD 21404-2329. Documents and information submitted under the Maryland Charitable Solicitations Act are also available from the Office of the Secretary of the State.