



I want to provide you with some context before we go into the steps. There were 20 students from diverse backgrounds with different lived experiences. We wanted to honour their strengths and interests (e.g., hands-on activities and sharing their feelings), while also being inclusive of all the students' different learning needs (e.g., autism, English Language Learner, ADHD, speech language delays and behaviour). Over the school year, Anna-May, had created a nurturing and inclusive classroom where they felt safe to share. One of their favourite areas was the calming station, a cozy corner in the class equipped with objects and materials that promote mindfulness and reflection.

As the end of the year approached, we wanted a project where the students could apply the skills they had learned in a fun hands-on way! Together we planned this project creating flat lay photos (steps outlined below). We did this with the needs of our learners in mind, providing different options to express their ideas (e.g., through objects, photographs, video and/or audio recording) so that all students would be successful. As you will read, it was a multifaceted learning task that challenged our students in many ways. We especially loved how each flat lay photograph is unique to the individual student.

## Part 1: Creating the Flat Lays

### Step 1



We introduced the concept of flat lay\* photographs to the Grade 1 students. We told them we wanted them to each create a flat lay photo of items that calm their brains.

\* A flat lay is simply an image shot direct from above (bird's eye view) of carefully arranged objects

Caption: Our Inspiration: [YouTube video](#) by TL Tina Zita

Video 1

Students had previously created a list of ways to calm their brains in their homeroom class. As a group in the library, we brainstormed a list of tangible items that students could bring in to represent these ideas.

Caption: Anchor chart of a classroom discussion on ways to calm the brain completed prior to the start of the project

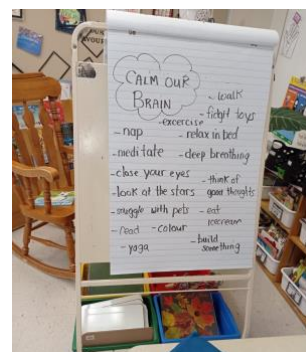


Figure 2

## Step 2

We introduced the project right before March break so our students would have the week to look for items at home. We sent a letter to parents about the project and gave them an empty ziplock bag to fill with objects that helped to calm their brains when they are sad, mad or feeling frustrated. They were encouraged to choose a variety of small objects as well as multiples of the same object. This was also a great way to involve our parent community in the project.



We knew that students might not bring enough items, so we also had a bin of items in the library that they could use.

Some students had meaningful items they wanted to include that were too large. We photographed those objects on our green screen so we could easily remove the background and digitally shrink them to add to their flat lay photograph. I never pass up an opportunity to use our green screen!



Photo Caption

Figure 3 - Bin of extra items for students to use (left)

Figure 4 - Students' teddy bear photographed on green screen so it could be digitally superimposed into the final flat lay photo (right)

## Step 3



As a class we sat in a circle and created a large board together. We took the flat lay photograph and displayed it on the SMART board. Next, we discussed what worked and what didn't. The white background colour fell flat and we decided to swap it for an array of brightly coloured bristol boards students used for their individual flat lays. We also noticed we needed smaller items to achieve a balanced look.

Figure 5 - Students co-creating the board

On the first day, we had some eager students who had already brought in their ziplock bags of items. They shared items with the class and told us why they chose them. This really helped give the other students ideas.

Figure 6 Caption: Ben and Amelia with ziplock bag of items for flat lay project [Audio Clip](#)



#### Step 4

Next, the process of building their individual flat lays began! The students really enjoyed designing them! We had photographs of sample flat lays as well as several I Spy books on display to give them ideas. Some students required support to arrange objects, but most worked independently. We encouraged students to fill in gaps with extra small items we had in the library (e.g., lego, puzzle pieces, marbles, beads, etc.). We made sure to leave an empty space on some of the boards for the green screen items we had to superimpose at the end. Each finished flat lay was unique to each student and they couldn't wait to tell us all about them!

#### [Video 2](#) - Creating Flat Lay Boards



## Figures 7-9

Caption Creating their boards

## Figure 10

### Teacher Tips for Building Flat Lays:

- Use neon bristol boards for the background (the dollar store has lots of options)
- Choose objects that are various sizes & include multiples of the same object. Start with large objects.
- Use a green screen for large objects to shrink and superimpose on photos. If you don't have to have a green screen, you can also use [erase.bg](#) or Adobe Express to remove the background from any photo.
- Turn on the grid on the camera when you are taking the photographs and take close up photos without zoom. Cropping photos after may affect the quality if you plan to print
- Tips for rhyming riddles: Carefully choose the objects and consider what they might rhyme with!



## *Part 2: Video Explanations*

### Step 5

The next stage of the project was to videotape the students telling us all about their flat lays. This was a really important part of the project as it gave insight into why they chose their items and how they use them as coping strategies. It was also useful to assess oral communication. Some students required prompting, but many impressed us with all the different strategies they use to help manage their emotions and calm their brains.

### Video 3

[Video](#) Explanation of How Students Calm Brains

Once the videos were complete, the teachers took photographs of each flat lay. We edited the photos slightly to enhance the colours. Finally, we superimposed all the green screen photos of the larger objects with the final flat lay photos.

## *Part 3: Writing the Riddles*

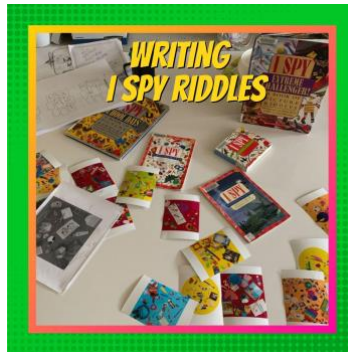


Figure 11

### Step 6 - Creating a List

Students were given a printout of their flat lays and they circled all the objects. Then they were given a graphic organizer to help make a list of all those items. These steps were done in the classroom. Afterwards, they handed it into their classroom teacher who corrected their spelling. For the final step, students were given a template where they had to find rhyming words for their objects. This was a difficult task for many (even the teachers). We conferenced with students and they also worked with their peers. We quickly realized that we needed to rethink the approach.



Figure 12  
Caption:  
Teacher/Student  
conferences



Figure 13 - Caption: Student sample of items



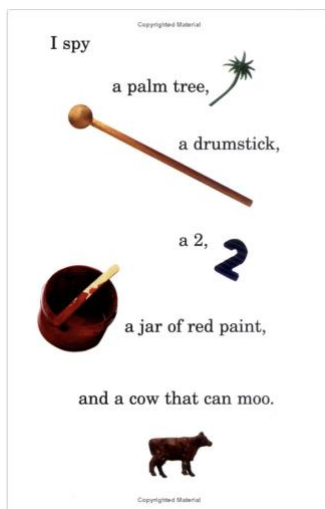
Figure 14 & 15 - Caption: Students working on listing items writing riddles

### Step 7 - Conferencing & Writing Riddles

We decided that we needed to conference individually with each student on their riddles and provide significant support. We tried to connect the clues to our book theme of what calms their brains. This was a challenge. It was helpful to watch the student video explanations that we had just finished recording and use some of the wording from those clips. The teachers prepared by doing this ahead of time and then we prompted students during the conference with rhyming words and the following questions:

- We need clues for\_\_\_\_\_.
- When do you do that?
- What do you do with it?
- How does it make you feel?

We co-wrote the riddles with students over a period of a couple weeks.



Another option could be to use visual clues as they do in some versions of I Spy books.

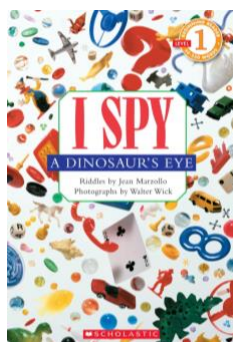


Figure 16 & 17

Caption: Excerpt from Jean Marzollo and Walter Wick book, "I Spy a Dinosaur Egg"  
Published Scholastic, 2003

## Part 4 - Bringing the Book to Life

### Step 8 - Recording the Riddles

We wanted to have the students record their riddles because it always brings a book to life! We love hearing their voices and it helps capture their excitement. You can [record directly into Book Creator](#) and we had a few students choose this option. However, we typically prefer to record in another application so that we can edit the audio clips.



Figure 18

Photo Caption: Gr 1 Student Matthew recording his riddle

This is especially helpful for primary students who may require multiple attempts to record. Furthermore, some students are unable to read so we had them repeat each line of their riddle after us and then edited out our voices.



Teacher Tip: Use a QuickVoice or another voice recorder to record explanations so that you can edit the clips and then [upload into Book Creator](#).

## Step 8 - Detective Fun

Ms. King's grade 1 students love to dress up and to act! We decided to have some fun and dress them up as detectives. They gave us some incredible detective poses and many students told us this was their favourite part of the project! This was also the perfect way to introduce the hidden sound clips in our digital book (see next step).

Video 4

[Video](#) of students posing as detectives



Figure 19

Photo

Caption: Page Excerpt from class book

## Step 9 - Invisible Audio Hotspots

One of my favourite ways to make the book interactive is to include invisible audio hotspots. For this project, we added a new layer to our *I Spy* book with an *I Hear* challenge. Readers can search for these sound bites by moving their cursor over the flat lay print. We took clips from the video explanations that we previously recorded and edited the audio into short clips that matched the object they were talking about.

“I hear something with my ear.  
I’ll give you a hint,  
There are \_\_\_ in the print”

Teacher Tip: Record video explanations so that you can embed them directly into the book. It also allows you to extract the audio from the video and use it on its own for the invisible audio hot spots

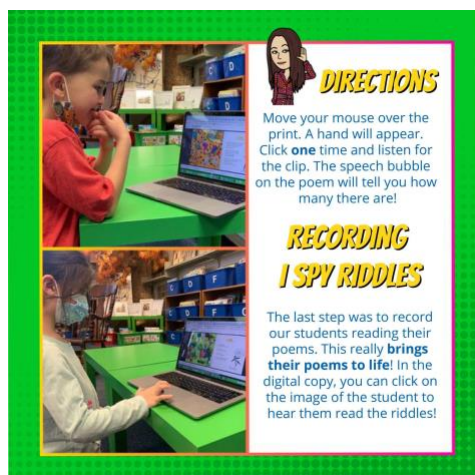


Figure 20 & 21  
Caption: Excerpts  
from class book with  
instructions for how to  
access hidden  
sounds

### Step 10 - Share the Book

We published our I Spy class book on Book Creator to share with our parent community. We also shared it on Twitter and tagged Walter Wick, the photo illustrator of the I Spy series. We were thrilled when he commented on the project! The students really wanted to meet him and we thought this would be the perfect finale to our project!



walter wick  
@walterwick

...

Replying to @CampbellMira @TDSB\_FHMillerPS and 3 others

So nice to see such multifaceted and multilayered learning tasks and rewards celebrated here. Well done teachers and students alike! 🏆

Figure 22

Caption: Walter Wick response to class on [Twitter](#)

### Virtual Visit with Walter Wick

We reached out and we were fortunate to arrange a short Zoom. Students prepared questions in advance and as a group we chose 5 to ask live. We were able to speak with him while he was in his studio and learned about his process for creating these elaborate scenes!! It was very inspirational. These authentic experiences where students get to

interact with professionals in the field are very impactful and support development of communication skills (e.g., listen actively and ask questions).

Figure 23

Photo Caption: Student asking Walter Wick a question during Virtual Visit.



## Big Reveal

If you have seen any of our other projects, you know we love a big reveal! We enjoy being able to surprise our students and celebrate their hard work and accomplishments. For this project, we tried something new. We took each student's double page layout and had it foamcore mounted as an end of the year gift. We included a tiny magnifying glass with it so they could search for each other's objects. It was a magical moment where you could see the pride they had in their work and the eagerness to share with their peers. This was a two part surprise because we had also printed hardcover books for the library and their classroom. We did two versions of the book. One longer version documented the whole learning journey, while the other included just the students' flat lay photographs with riddles.



[Read the digital book!](#)

Figure 24 Caption: Printed hardcover copies of class book from [Pikto](#)



TeacherTip: Mini Magnifying Glasses from [Party City](#) Figure 25 & 26

Captions: Students looking at wrapped gifts. (Figure 26) Close up of card to students

Watch the Video Reveal...we know it will melt your hearts!



[Video 5](#)

Video Caption: Grade 1 Reveal for I Spy Project

“You have a significant influence on students’ lives. You’re a trusted and caring adult, and can model healthy habits, validate students’ experiences and feelings, and help them learn about and care for their mental health”

[School Mental Health Ontario Website](#)

## **Conclusion**

### **So what are the benefits of collaboration? A Classroom Teacher’s Perspective:**

Tackling a project of this magnitude is much easier with two teachers. It helps with planning and communicating with families. But most of all, you have more time for individual conferences with students where they can express their thoughts and emotions. Collaborating with a Teacher-Librarian skilled at integrating technology is beneficial because we were able to co-design a deep and engaging learning experience for our students.

## Reflecting on the Experience

**It's more fun working with a colleague** - the excitement and enthusiasm for a project builds when we work together. The students see our excitement and it transfers to them.

### **Opportunity to model an important learning skill for students - Collaboration**

The interaction between teachers becomes part of the learning experience. Furthermore, as colleagues collaborating, we challenge each other. That promotes rich dialogue and ultimately, we achieve more.

**Outreach to our parent community to inspire reading and learning** - we love that we could include our parent community in this project. They were able to help students collect items. We also noticed how some students were very comfortable talking about strategies and had many items to choose from. It indicated to us that these strategies were clearly a part of their daily routine at home as well. Many parents ordered a copy of the book which will be a great keepsake and reminder of these coping tools. Hopefully it will also inspire their children to practise reading. It's much more meaningful when students see themselves and peers in a book. Creating a hardcover book that looks like a "real" book is a powerful motivator.

"The book came out! The actual copy of the book!!"

~ Grade 1 Student Matthew

There is also a digital copy of the book with videos and recordings that families can enjoy listening to together. It may also help them learn new ideas and further develop their coping strategies and skills. We designed it as an interactive I Spy book where students can search for their peers' items and then listen to how the item helps them. It's perfect for parents to read with their child whenever it fits into their schedule. (It can be read on any device, even a phone!)

Finally, you can never underestimate the power of a big celebration and recognition outside of the school community. The pride students feel is evident in the reveal video. We hope that these positive experiences will stay with them and encourage them to continue to work hard! Reveals are also a wonderful opportunity for us as teachers to reflect back on the project and what we learned from it.

### *How to Achieve Successful Student Results*

**Some careful planning ahead of time**, will help this project run smoothly. Give parents a week or more notice to collect items. Make sure to give them a list of suggestions. We would also recommend stating the bag must be full. Some students only brought 1 or 2 items which was not enough. Also consider what words rhyme with the objects. We did not think of this ahead of time, which made writing riddles much more challenging.

**It's a good idea to start with a class brainstorm** - to help give students ideas of what to bring and how to create the flay lay. It's also good to model what doesn't work and have them give feedback. When we created our group flat lay as a class we noticed what didn't work (e.g., we need more small items, multiples of the same object and the white background doesn't look good). The students really built off each other's ideas.

**You need way more time than you think** to create and photograph the boards. It's really helpful if they can be left out for a week. Students will inevitably be absent or forget their items. We also found that it helps to be able to take a break from creating and come back to the board on a different day for a final look.

**Take more photos than you think you need**, especially at close range. This will help the quality of the images which is crucial if you are going to print a book. You lose quality when you crop the photos.

**Double check the final photo for all items** mentioned in the riddle (including green screen items you plan to superimpose on the photo). We missed one item and had to reprint the final gift.

**Videotape students when they are sharing thoughts**. We find this especially important with younger students because they often forget and won't remember exactly what they told you if you ask them to repeat it. The video is helpful for documenting and capturing the students' thoughts and ideas *in their own words*. We ended up using the videos and the wording they used when co-writing the riddles.

**Let It Go**. Sometimes as teachers, we get attached to our plan and how we imagine lessons will go. Being able to stop, reflect and adjust our plans to meet the students where they're at is what teaching is all about. We initially thought the students would be able to create some rhymes with peers or even independently, but we didn't

realize how hard it would be to rhyme with items on their board. We had to re-think the approach and conferences individually and provide significant support.

**It's critical to provide students with choice and a variety of ways to share their voice** - Book Creator provided the flexibility to express their individual creativity and style. We are able to embed sound clips, videos, photographs which really bring the book to life. The unexpected outcome of this project was how engaged the students became in the experience and how they worked on this project for an extended period of time. Students who were usually distracted or quick to finish activities, took their time. Deep learning was evident because it was a meaningful experience with an authentic audience.

**Interactive** - We made the digital copy of the book very interactive which was a huge hit with our students. They were amazed how their voice could be heard when you clicked on individual items in their flat lay. They can also read the riddles in the eBook outside of class time with their families and search for items on their peers' pages.

**Differentiating the expectations is necessary** - there were a range of levels in the class and some students were able to share more orally than others. We knew that some students would require significant support (e.g. prompting, rephrasing, etc.) to explain their thinking about their items. However, everyone was able to create a board and were excited to showcase their items. We scribed for all students when co-creating the riddles to make sure we could capture their ideas.

**Students need explicit lessons on calming strategies** - the teacher has previously done a lot of work discussing and modelling mindfulness throughout the year (e.g., incorporating calming music, yoga and breathing techniques). As a group we also had to brainstorm what concrete item we could bring to represent some of the less obvious ideas (e.g., breathing - some used number candles to represent counting or taking 3 deep breaths).

**Having a global audience** outside of their classroom, shows students that their work is valued. It was meaningful when we shared their stories on Twitter and the photographer of the I Spy Series, Walter Wick, saw and commented on their project. That recognition from a professional author really boosts their confidence. Having a zoom with him was the icing on the cake! They were so mesmerized that when they came into the library and saw him on the screen, they were silent and he thought we were muted! It provided a really learning opportunity for students to generate thoughtful deep questions and practise active listening. Plus it was really cool to see



his studio with all the props! We were also featured in Book Creator's blog! Our students greatly benefited from these authentic experiences which made the project unforgettable.

We hope you learn from our experience and embark on a collaborative journey of your own. Consider what can be achieved beyond the curriculum and traditional lessons you associate with the library!

## **References**

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