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St. Jude patient Max
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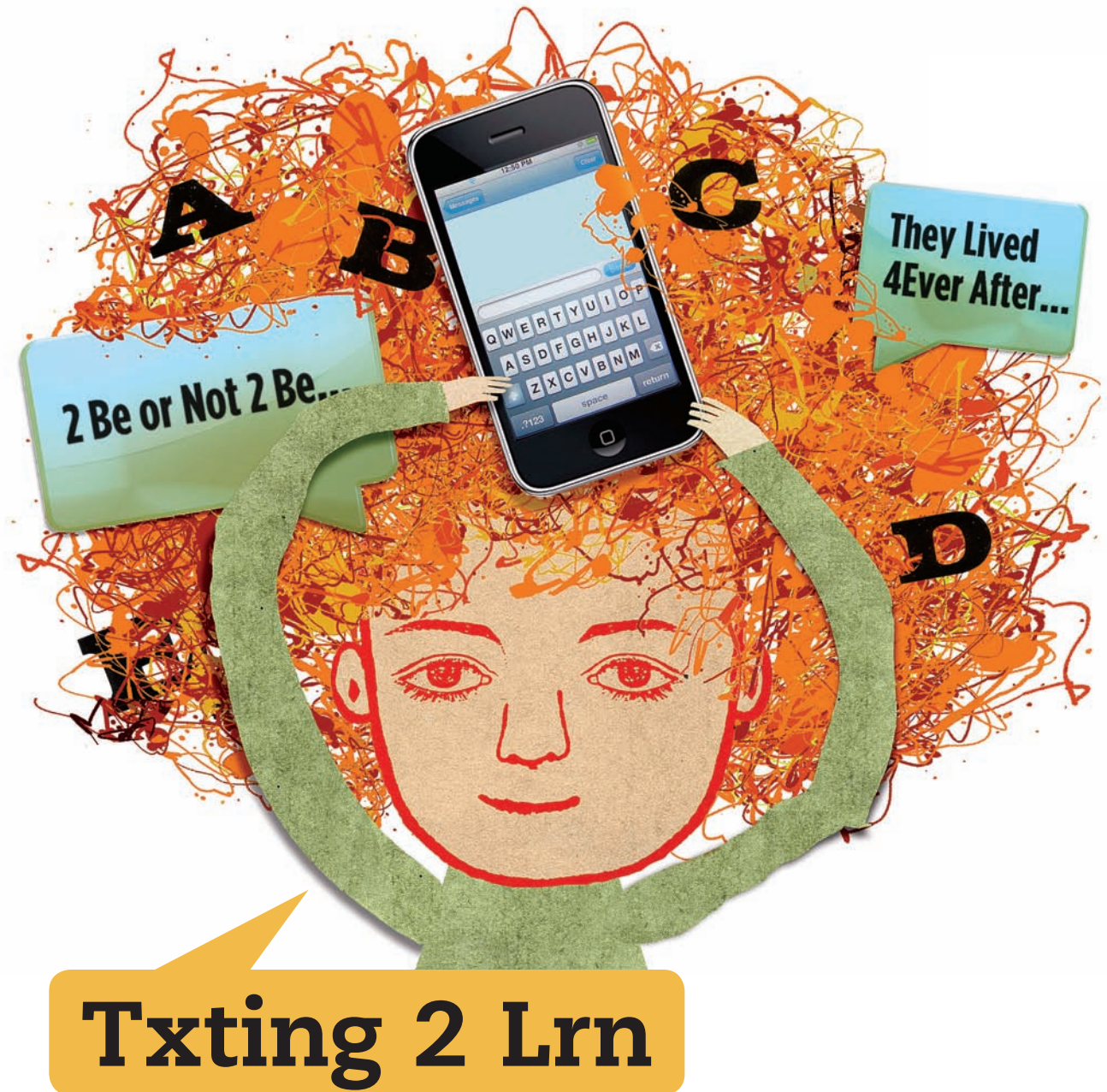

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 SCHOLASTIC



Two recent studies show texting improves spelling. *By Anne Trubek*

The average American teen, you may not be shocked to discover, texts a lot: 3,339 messages per month, according to a recent Nielsen survey. Girls outpace boys, averaging more than 4,000 texts per month. That's more than 130 of them a day, every day, or a text every 10 minutes, almost around

the clock. However you look at it, cell phones have revolutionized the way kids communicate.

How should teachers respond? Chances are you have a colleague who laments texting as a sign of declining standards and a contributor to illiteracy. Historian Niall Ferguson's opinion piece in *Newsweek*, "Texting Makes U Stupid,"

exemplifies the general line of attack: Teens who text do not read books, he asserts. And they have no interest in culture: "Show a teenager Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi*. You might get a cursory glance before a buzz signals the arrival of the latest SMS."

Such attacks are easy to find—perhaps because they're easy to write. They

are not based on research. (No negative association has been made between texting and reading skills.) In fact, if we look at studies on texting, a different conclusion emerges: Texting increases literacy, and it improves, of all things, spelling. Turn the page to find out how, and to discover the best ways to incorporate texting into your lessons.

ILLUSTRATION: MIGUEL DAVILLA

TEXTING TO LEARN

FACT: Texting helps students read.

A British study published in the *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* found a positive correlation between texting and literacy, concluding that texting was “actually driving the development of phonological awareness and reading skill in children.”

In other words, contrary to what you might think when faced with “creative” usages such as *ur* for *your*, *2* for *to*, and *w8* for *wait*, kids who text may be stronger readers and writers than those who don’t.

FACT: Texting boosts phonology.

To abbreviate *message* as *msg* or *tonight* as *2nite*, you have to understand how sounds and letters work, or how words are put together. Texting encourages students to think about these relationships, helping them to understand how words are built. A study in the *Australian Journal of Educational Development & Psychology* showed that texting improves spelling because it increases these phonological skills.

FACT: Students know when not to text.

If you’re worried about grading a pile of *The Catcher in the Rye* essays written in text speak, fear not. In research conducted for a dissertation at the City University in London, graduate student Veenal Raval found that most students avoid textisms in their schoolwork. “They are able to ‘code-switch’ the same way that I would... use slang when speaking

to my friends and adopt a more formal means when talking to colleagues,” Raval told the *Telegraph*. In other words, students change how they spell according to the circumstances and the audience. They know to spell out the word *tomorrow* in a paper, but when making plans with friends, they go with *tom*.

FACT: Texting is a fun way to play with words.

Why would an educator ever want to discourage kids from playing with words? The more adventurous kids are with spelling, usage, and grammar the better. Rather than pulling out our hair, we should remember that texting is writing. And *srsly*, what tableau could be more LOL-worthy than a gaggle of children sitting quietly by their lockers, writing away?

FACT: Inventing new textisms is creative.

Creating a textism isn’t easy. You have to break the word into something short and catchy without sacrificing meaning. Try it: Choose a longish word, and come up with an abbreviation you might use in a text. The 160-character limit promotes creativity among texters just as tight metrical and rhyming patterns do among poets.



ONLINE TOOLS

There are a growing number of resources that can help you use texting in the classroom. Here are some of our favorites.

classparrot.com

Allows you to send free text-message alerts to students and parents—think “Spelling test tomorrow” or “Don’t forget your field trip money.”

polleverywhere.com

Lets you create easy polls that you can text to students and then immediately view the results. Perfect for quizzing science facts or responding to literature.

studyboost.com

Enables students to answer and discuss topics of your choosing inside or outside of class, all via text message.

clickerschool.com

Turns any phone or tablet into a clicker-style student response system that can accommodate both multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

cel.ly

Facilitates group texting and allows you to curate responses (so you can push Brenda’s answer to everyone, for example, but not Johnny’s).

FACT: Textisms have historical roots.

Abbreviations are a natural part of the evolution of language. OK, the most popular American word in the world, was invented during the age of the telegraph, because it was concise. Teachers found OK as inappropriate then as they do *c u l8r* today. But OK found its way into our lexicon soon enough, and these days we couldn’t do without it. The most popular textisms are already becoming official: The *Oxford English Dictionary* added *OMG* last year. New technologies—from the printing press to the telegraph to the cell phone—inevitably inspire new spelling, new abbreviations, and new words.

FACT: Texting does not distract students.

Well, it’s no more of a distraction than the time-honored habit of secretly passing notes (those kids—always writing!). It is just the latest back channel for students to use during class. Of course, teachers should have rules about when kids can text, and for what reason. Not because texting itself is bad, but because students should be paying attention to the teacher.

Other than setting firm cell-phone policies, one way to minimize back-channel texting is to openly embrace the platform in your classroom as a tool for learning. Your willingness to explore students’ favorite form of communication may help to establish mutually respectful boundaries. See our fresh ideas for incorporating texting into your lessons on the next page.

ACTIVITY: Talk about audience.

Ask students to write a 20-word text to a friend about what they did last night. Then have them rewrite that text to their parents. Finally, they should rewrite it for you. Discuss how we use different vocabulary, syntax, and even spelling for different audiences. Knowing which “code” to use for which audience is a key skill for any 21st-century student.

ACTIVITY: Break down words.

Try challenging students to come up with textisms for yet-unabbreviated vocabulary words such as *fallacious* or *conundrum*. Exploring the



phonology of new words will help students remember their spellings. You can also ask students to match vocabulary with existing text-speak (pairing *uproarious* with *LOL*, for example) as a memory device.

ACTIVITY: Learn effective note-taking.

At its heart, texting is a form of shorthand and a skill that may come in handy when students encounter a teacher or professor who speaks a mile a minute. Talk with students about the con-

nections between texting and note-taking: Why do both use abbreviations? How do you communicate big ideas using few words? Together, brainstorm a list of curriculum-related textisms students might use in their notes.


ACTIVITY: Get immediate feedback.

Student response systems, or “clickers,” offer kids the opportunity to “text” replies to your questions or prompts (search “8 Clickers to Consider” at scholastic.com/instructor to see our picks). Some schools allow students to text answers with their personal cell phones, using apps that turn smartphones into clickers.

If neither of these options works for you, suggest students write short-answer textisms on dry-erase boards or slates.

ACTIVITY: Study character.

Make literature and history relevant to your students’ digital lives by asking them to send texts from the point of view of a character or real-world historical figure. What would Romeo text Juliet? What would Abraham Lincoln message Mary Todd on the eve of the Gettysburg Address? Encourage half of your students to take the point of view of the sender, and the other half to assume the point of view of the recipient. Then let the connections begin! □



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Great Ideas for the Classroom:

- Reading directions and/or answer choices
- Listening centers
- Add additional stickers on pages or at the end with questions
- Audio scavenger hunts
- Add a second sticker to each page and record in a different language
- Have an older student record books for younger students
- Take one home to record a favorite book and share it with the class
- Add sound stickers to stories
- Turn a book into a play with different students recording each character



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