

VOICES



The Newsletter of the Touchstones' Discussion Project

www.touchstones.org

We build critical thinking, communication, leadership, and community through respectful, engaging discussion-based programs for all people.

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- Kent County Expands
- Touchstones Professional Development Program In Haiti
- Shakespeare First Folio Event
- #GivingTuesday 2016



Touchstones 2016 Year in Review!



Touchstones Volunteers, Friends and Staff gathered on Saturday, December 10th in Annapolis for our annual year-end event, and this year we had so much to celebrate! We celebrated our first capital campaign, our Volunteer and Teacher of the Year, and all the good work that Touchstones has done over the past twelve months. So far, Touchstones campaign has raised over \$700,000 in pledges, gifts received and projects completed, including our newest volume *Exploring American Perspectives Volume I*. Specifically, the campaign has allowed Touchstones this year to donate over \$95,000 worth of books and programming and training, which includes 63 scholarship seats for our Open Enrollment Workshops held at our office in Stevensville, Maryland. In 2017,

Touchstones trained and coached more than 500 teachers trained around the US and Canada. The end result is that more and more students are participating in Touchstones programs to learn to be active learners, effective speakers and listeners, critical thinkers, and collaborative leaders.

In addition to celebrating the success of the campaign thus far, we introduced guests of honor, **Karole Turner-Campbell (Touchstones Volunteer of the Year)** and **Larry Harris (Touchstones Teacher of the Year)**. Karole has been a friend of Touchstones for many years, first as a teacher and principal using Touchstones in a school in Harlem, as a Touchstones Board member for several years, and currently as an active artist and continuing educator in Charleston, SC. Karole's beautiful artwork can be found [here](#) on her website. Karole helped to organize a one-year anniversary exhibition to commemorate the massacre at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, SC. Part of the exhibition "Do or Die" that showcased the work of artist Fahamu Pecou, the HALSEY Institute of Art included the development of a Touchstones program for students from Title 1 middle and high schools (members of the Chucktown Squash Scholars program) together to discuss art, race, community, and healing. Pecou's moving art can be found [here](#). At our gathering on Saturday, Karole shared how central Touchstones has been for her as an educator and a member of our society. She spoke of how Touchstones on September 11, 2011 allowed her students in Harlem to work together to process the terrible events that day and during the months afterward. Karole's moving speech can be seen on our Vimeo site [here](#).

Larry Harris is a teacher from Elkton High School in Cecil County Maryland. He also shared his love of Touchstones. He told the audience how initially he was skeptical of the program but after witnessing the changes in his students, and perhaps more importantly in himself, he has become a true Touchstones fan! His hometown newspaper, The Cecil Whig, did a story on his Touchstones Teacher of the Year award and can be found [here](#).

One can imagine there is always amazing conversation when Touchstones friends and supporters come together, and last Saturday proved no exception. It was exciting to have so many people together who understand the importance of civic discourse and the on-going need to build listening and critical thinking skills in all life-long learners. We ended the lovely evening by having one of Touchstones board members, Ford Rowan, thank those who has given to Touchstones this past year, and ask for those who haven't yet given to help support all the incredible work Touchstones in doing in so many different communities by participating in our campaign.

Campaign Donations



Larry Harris
2016 Teacher of the Year
Award presented by Cindy Barry



Karole Turner Campbell
2016 Volunteer of the Year
Award presented by Howard Ziederman



**Guests Ayesha Darab, Ford Rowan, and
Phil Richmond**



Lauren and Mike Stahly

Another Maryland County Expands Touchpebbles and Touchstones

Over the last three years, Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) has adopted Touchstones for grade nine, ten, and eleventh grade English classes district-wide. Thousands of students each year in AACPS are now practicing their speaking, listening, critical thinking, and collaboration skills in Touchstones discussions.



ANNE ARUNDEL
COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

While many places around the U.S. would like to follow AACPS's example, they are not able to because of funding short-falls. Kent County School District, one of Maryland's smallest and most rural counties, has been using Touchstones programs since 2013. In 2017, thanks to a generous grant to Touchstones by the Pettus Crowe Foundation, Kent County will significantly expand that implementation to include students in grades 2 through 8, with high school students beginning no later than 2018. This testimonial from a middle school teacher in Kent County is only one of many compelling reasons for Touchstones in this district—and all school districts—across the U.S.:

"I teach a diverse set of 5 classes comprised of students from all social/economic and academic levels. Our community is one of high poverty—our school is part of the Title I program. Most importantly and sadly, our children of color are primarily of the poverty level. My goals are to inspire my students to see beyond our small rural community to larger goals—to see themselves as intelligent, hardworking, high achieving...to set goals beyond high school...to see an education as the key to success." – D. Reynolds

Touchstones' staff has already had two planning meetings with district coordinators, administrators, and principals and will run the first series of workshops for teachers in mid-January. We are thrilled to be able to meet this need and thank both the educators in Kent County and the Pettus Crowe Foundation for their partnership.

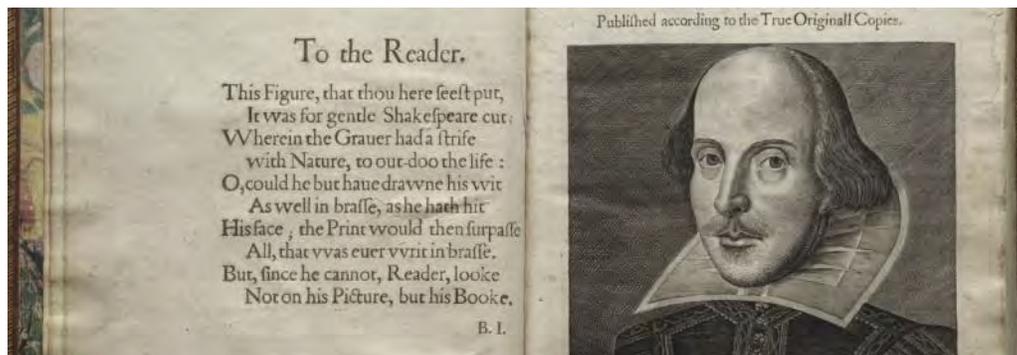
Welcome to Touchstones' Newest Professional Learning Community

In the world of education, there are more acronyms than one can imagine: IEPs, SLOs, and PLCs are only a few. A PLC is a Professional Learning Community within a school community, and generally a PLC is formed to achieve a particular goal among educational professionals. This fall, the Children's Academy and Learning Center in Port-au-Prince, Haiti launched a Touchstones PLC, using Touchstones Volume A in Kreyol. The Children's Academy, founded and run by Haiti Partners, is growing each year and plans to graduate its first grade students into their second grade next year. The school is committed to providing exceptional opportunities for its Haitian students, and Touchstones is part of that commitment.



This PLC includes about 20 teachers, administrators, parents, and members of the community who are learning together what it means to lead and participate in Touchstones discussions. In Touchstones, the role of the leader is gradually to impart responsibility for leadership to all members of a group. Simultaneously, through the Touchstones lessons, participants practice how to speak with and listen to others responsively and openly. They examine their own ideas and the thinking of their colleagues, and they reflect on specific discussion dynamics to resolve issues such as dominance, silence, passivity, and poor listening skills, to name a few. Reports from Haiti Partners' program coordinators who are monitoring this pilot are encouraging. Participation in the group is growing, and nine sessions into Touchstones A there is gender balance in the discussions—not something that one often sees in any group and a promising sign that these participants are taking their responsibilities to each other very seriously. The work and growth accomplished in the PLC this year will not only strengthen the schools' instructional team overall, but it will also shape the very culture of the school for years to come.

Touchstones thanks the Rossman Family Foundation for its support for this project.



Shakespeare: Illuminating the Invisible Discussing the Bard

On Tuesday, November 15th, Touchstones and St. John's College partnered to present an Evening of Discussion, "Shakespeare: Illuminating the Invisible." To celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the Folger Shakespeare Library sent First Folios to universities in all 50 states. The Mitchell Gallery at St. John's College was the host college for the state of Maryland.

As part of the month long exhibit and community events surrounding the First Folio Tour, Touchstones Discussion Project was invited by St. John's College and PNC Bank to develop a discussion focused on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This provided a unique opportunity to develop a special evening for St. John's Friends' Board members and guests of PNC Bank.

Howard Zeiderman, Touchstones' Co-founder and President, designed a Touchstones discussion juxtaposing Shakespeare's "To Be or Not To Be" soliloquy from *Hamlet* in the 1603 Quarto and the iconic version of *Hamlet*'s speech in the 1623 First Folio." These two texts differ significantly in terms of both content and tone. This discussion enabled the participants to examine the invisible - the invisible in a text, the invisible in our thoughts, and the invisible in society.

St. John's and Touchstones share a commitment to collaborative exploration through discussion. The evening event at St. John's presented an opportunity to reinforce the Touchstones' approach to developing essential 21st Century skills and attitudes of empathy and collaboration. The participants enjoyed a lively discussion and learned about the powerful skill building that occurs during Touchstones discussion based programs.

Some Highlights of Touchstones' Accomplishments in 2016, Thanks to Donors Like You!

On November 29th Touchstones staff, board members, volunteers, and loyal supporters rallied to raise funds for the 4th annual #GivingTuesday, a day dedicated to worldwide philanthropy and giving. Touchstones is applying all funds raised to provide free class sets of Touchstones curricula to teachers working in underfunded schools.

After a three-week email and social media campaign, donations came rolling in! In total, we:

- Raised over \$12,000
- Had over 70 donors participate
- Will be able to provide over 17 class sets of curricular material



We'd like to thank you all for your continued support of Touchstones and your generous gifts on #GivingTuesday. Touchstones is proud to work with inspiring teachers who continue to foster collaboration, civil discourse, and leadership!

We would like to specially acknowledge a few folks who went the extra mile on #GivingTuesday; John Christensen, Nick Maistrellis, Alexandra Fotos, and Liz Estes. Thank you to everyone who participated, spread the word, and worked hard to get curricula to teachers and students in high poverty schools.

Touchstones looks forward to fostering a more
inclusive, respectful, and collaborative society in 2017!

