

## Teachin' Books Episode 0.0 – Trailer / Intro & Intentions

[Music “Homer Said” by [Dyalla Swain](#)]

**00:10:** Hey! This is Teachin' Books, a podcast all about the ways that people teach, learn, and work with literature. I'm Jessica McDonald, and on today's first-ever episode, or maybe minisode, or maybe just a trailer, I'm going to tell you a little bit about me, about what you can expect in the podcast, and about my intentions in starting this podcast.

I'm not going to lie: it feels a little weird to talk into this mic by myself, at home, without somebody else on the other end, because I've been doing a lot of interviews ahead of the launch of this podcast, but I have not really done much in the way of solo recording yet. So, we'll see how this goes!

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[Music: “Homer Said”]

**01:00:** I was born in Edmonton, Alberta, and raised in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, which is where I live now. My mom's from Edmonton, my dad's from Mississauga, Ontario, and I have spent my whole life on the Canadian prairies, which means that my own teaching and learning experiences are really grounded in this particular region. And in particular, my teaching and learning perspectives have been deeply shaped by the approximately -- yes -- fourteen years that I spent in post-secondary education on the prairies, mostly in Saskatoon at the U of S (for my undergrad as well as my PhD), but also in Edmonton, where I completed my Master's degree.

My degrees are in English, or rather the literatures written in English, and that's what I've been teaching since 2012 in all different roles and positions at the University of Saskatchewan and at St. Thomas More College. But I'm actually not teaching this fall for the first time in a really long time, and instead I have a full-time research position, a postdoc, at Simon Fraser University. So, I've really been missing the social energy and the conversation and the relationships of teaching, and that's where this podcast comes in.

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**02:22:** You might have noticed the title of the show is “Teachin' Books.” And, really, that title is questionably good -- or bad -- but it came about because I've been thinking for a long time, for a couple of years actually, about the possibilities of starting a scholarly podcast or a podcast that would touch on some aspects of my teaching and learning life -- my professional work. As I was thinking of what kind of podcast I'd like to develop, I thought in the summer of 2020, finally, of this idea: of just having a podcast on the things I like to talk about, which is how I teach with books, and how my friends and other “educators” (in the loosest sense) teach with texts -- how we teach, learn, and work with literature.

So that's how the title kind of came to be: I literally had a document in my phone labelled “Teachin' books,” and it was a document that outlined some very preliminary ideas for this podcast on, I guess, teachin' books. Eventually, I thought, oh I'll probably think of a different name -- you know, something not so literal -- but no, that name stuck. It's actually how I talk. I often will say I teach books, I'm a teacher of books, I'm teaching books, and so it's just a title that feels right to me.

And yeah, it represents quite literally what the podcast will do: I will chat about the ways that I teach with literature, I will interview folks from a variety of traditional and non-traditional education contexts

to find out what they're doing with literature these days. And I guess I should say that, from the title, this podcast purports to be about "books," but actually I'm interested in all sorts of cultural texts that make their way into teaching and learning -- not just novels, or books, or so-called literary fiction, but also poetry, and nonfiction, and comics, and plays, and films, and music, and oral storytelling, video games, memes, texts of all sorts. "Texts" used in the sort of liberal, loose way that English folk like to use that word.

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**04:43:** So my intentions or my goals for the podcast can sort of be categorized in part by this title, and I kind of wanted to start with intentions because this is something I've been doing or trying to do a lot more in my scholarly work, which is: always making clear -- at least for myself if not for others, for the readers, for the listeners, for the public -- why I'm doing what I'm doing, or what my intentions are, as part of a practice of scholarly accountability, I guess. So my intentions for the podcast have to do with teachin', the first part of the title, in part because what I'd like for the podcast to do is to really feature the variety of "educators" out there. I want to give cool folks a platform to talk more about their work and their teaching.

Another intention of the podcast is to emphasize and to really foreground the sessionals, the grad students, the precariously employed educators who do a huge amount of the teaching in post-secondary education, which is the educational context I work within, teaching in universities and colleges classrooms.

And another intention is to show that there are many different ways in which people teach and learn. Teaching and learning is not singular, it's not universalizable, and it's not uniform. I was recently reading this collection called *Dissonant Methods*, edited by Ada Jaarsma and Kit Dobson, and they talk a lot in that collection, over and over (the contributors do), about this crucial reality that teaching and learning are not reducible to universal methods or practices that will work across all classrooms. In fact, teaching and learning methods are dissonant. There's dissonance in the various methods that we use in, say, Humanities classrooms. And I hope and expect that will be something that comes across in the podcast, and in the interviews especially.

And, of course, another reason for this podcast is just that I want to learn for myself more cool ways to teach books. I'm always on the lookout to learn more tricks and tips and learn more about the ways that people engage with literature in their classrooms and outside of classrooms because of course we're also going to be looking at folks who teach and learn in other contexts. So, I just want to develop my thinking about pedagogy through conversation, through dialogue.

Now, the "books" part of Teachin' Books is also important to the intentions of this podcast. One of my goals is to show the many complicated ways that literature applies to and is used to learn about really crucial social and political issues. This is something that's come out of conversations with my folks -- my folks? Yeah, actually that's true! -- conversations with my parents, and my family, my friends, who are sometimes surprised to find out that I don't just teach about literary texts. I don't just teach about stories and narrative devices and that kind of thing, but I'm also teaching history and politics and geography, and I'm teaching literature alongside other disciplines and other areas. My hope is that this podcast will show that literature and the study of literature can be used to learn about those "real world" issues because of course that connection to the real world is something that's foregrounded in a lot of our classrooms.

I mentioned, also, that I am not teaching this semester, and obviously we are in the middle of a global pandemic. We're in the middle of all of the isolation and social distancing, and the changes to our work and the way that we teach and learn that COVID-19 has brought. Part of starting this podcast has to do with how teaching and learning are social practices, and I'm really just trying to work against my own COVID-19 "isolation feelz," and not being on campus everyday, and not being around students everyday, and not being around my colleagues everyday. This podcast is a way that I'm hoping to reach out to folks, and in the interviews I've had already I think it's really served that purpose, which is just building community and conversation and dialogue despite the circumstances that we're in right now: chatting with my friends, building relationships with other rad folks, other educators, other podcasters, building solidarity networks around or in spite of or because of the challenges and the possibilities of teaching -- with both listeners of the podcast, heeey!, and also with the interviewees who come on.

And, actually, I'm drawing here on the work of other scholars, other podcasters, other public thinkers before me who have talked about podcasting in its community-building capacities. So in the show notes, I'll post links to talks and pieces by Hannah McGregor, who is a podcaster and a professor at Simon Fraser University, and Mathieu Aubin, who is a postdoc at Concordia and a researcher in oral literary history. There are others who have already spoken about the kind of community-building nature of podcasting. But for me, in the midst of the pandemic and in the midst of this semester of not teaching after so long teaching, that capacity for podcasting is really highlighted, and I hope will be part of what this podcast does as it moves along.

Okay, I wasn't sure if I would say this out loud -- after all, I'm only revealing some of the intentions, I think some intentions for work are inevitably often personal or individual -- but let it be said: I truly do have written down here, in my notes and my original goals for this podcast, to "have fun and make jokes LOL more laughing in 2020." I think it's a valiant goal to actually laugh and have fun in this hellscape.

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[Music: "Homer Said"]

**11:04:** Beyond that, and more importantly, this podcast is part of how I'm figuring out my own place and my own role in and against the settler-colonial institution that I've basically grown up in, the institution of the university, especially as a cis white woman who -- while I am temporarily / precariously employed, and that has material effects on the power I have -- I do hold an undeniable degree of power at the so-called front of the classroom. Figuring out what to do with that and inside an institution that has done such harm is part of what I'll be figuring out here.

The project is also part of me working on listening as a scholarly practice, working on interview and dialogue skills for similar reasons, as a kind of scholarly practice, working on verbal and oral articulation. That polished, academic kind of traditional way of speaking does not come naturally to me, and I'm not sure that it should, either. But certainly, a kind of development in oral articulation, in expressing ideas verbally, is really appealing to me, especially as an emerging scholar who has been (for most of my academic life) incredibly shy and sometimes, or at least in the past, hesitant to verbalize things that I could or would sooner write down.

To some folks, I've been calling this podcast an exercise in academic bravery because for me it certainly is. It's so out of the box of what I would have imagined myself doing, you know, five years ago. But it's also because I've been thinking about what academic bravery looks like, or what does it mean to be

brave in the context of academia, and what does that mean for me? And so this podcast sort of represents a tiny step in the direction of practicing academic bravery.

And those are really the goals or the intentions that I have for this podcast as it moves forward, and we'll see how things shake down, and how things change, and how the intentions develop as we go on. But I'm really excited for it, and I hope that you'll listen along!

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[Music: "Homer Said"]

**13:43:** This episode was recorded on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis. My teaching and learning on these lands have been deeply shaped by the work of Indigenous writers, scholars, and activists, and today I want to pay recognition to the work of Sky Dancer Louise Bernice Halfe, an award-winning Cree writer, community leader, and Elder at the University of Saskatchewan, who is based in and around Saskatoon (though she was actually born in Alberta). I've been reading and laughing with and learning from Halfe's books, and her talks, and her readings, since undergrad. Her poetry is hilarious and moving and unflinching and complicated. I teach her poems often, and I'm sure that they'll feature in a future podcast episode, but for now, I want to put a link to her work in the show notes, so please check her out if you're not already familiar. And I'd love to hear about if you teach with her poems.

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**14:45:** The podcast music is by Dyalla Swain, whose work you can find at <https://soundcloud.com/dyallas>.

You can follow the podcast on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @TeachinBooksPod (no "g" in that teachin'!).

To chat about the podcast, use the hashtag #TeachinBooksPod. I do not think that hashtag has been used yet, but I should probably use it soon to get the conversation started. You can also get in touch via email at [teachinbookspod@gmail.com](mailto:teachinbookspod@gmail.com).

Alright, y'all: what should my sign-off be? I have no idea. I have been racking my brain for a long time. I've been asking friends, I sent some of my fellow academic friends a GIF that expressed the way that I feel about teaching -- which is burning a room down, lighting a whole classroom on fire -- and I had some really great suggestions, but I'm still thinking about it. I'm not sure what my sign-off should be. If you have an idea for one, please do send it to me at [teachinbookspod@gmail.com](mailto:teachinbookspod@gmail.com) or just get in touch with me wherever you can. I would love to know what my sign-off should be! But for now I will sign off by saying: thanks for listening.

[Music: "Homer Said"]