

PLATO NOW

January 2026



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WELCOME TO A NEW YEAR OF PLATO NOW

We are happy to debut our first edition of an enhanced ***PLATO NOW***. Published quarterly, each expanded issue will feature an array of PLATO programs and people, highlighting the many ways that philosophy is alive in classrooms and communities.

In this Issue

<u>30th Anniversary</u>	3
<u>30 Years, 30 Voices</u>	4
<u>Initiative 2026–2027: The Purposes of Education</u>	5-6
<u>PLATO’s Book of the Year</u>	7
<u>Sustaining Circle</u>	7
<u>Program Spotlight: Philosophers-in-Residence</u>	8
<u>Partner Spotlight: Stanford Online High School</u>	9
<u>Events</u>	10
<u>Program Deadlines</u>	11
<u>New Online Resource</u>	11



30TH ANNIVERSARY

In 2026, PLATO celebrates 30 years of bringing philosophy to life for young people, educators, and communities.

The Early Years

PLATO's story began in 1996, when the Center for Philosophy for Children was founded in Seattle, Washington, by Dr. Jana Mohr Lone. That same year, Jana and David Shapiro (now a PLATO board member) launched the Philosophers in the Schools program and hosted the organization's first teacher workshop at the University of Washington. Soon after, the Center became affiliated with the UW Department of Philosophy and was recognized as an official university academic research center.



A community where those committed to doing philosophy with young people could exchange ideas, share resources, and find support.

Over the years, the Center developed a wide range of programs: university courses focused on philosophy with young people, the Philosophers-in-Residence Program in the Seattle Public Schools, the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl, graduate fellowships, and national and international events and programs for educators, families, and visiting scholars.

Building a National Community

In 2010 Jana Mohr Lone partnered with Roberta Israeloff, director of the Squire Family Foundation, to found PLATO. Their shared vision was to create a community where those committed to doing philosophy with young people could exchange ideas, share resources, and find support. Over the next decade, PLATO offered conferences, webinars, seminars, grants, publications, and an open-access website library—all powered by volunteers and a deeply committed community.

As PLATO grew, it became clear that sustaining and expanding its work required a dedicated staff and a larger organization. At the same time, the Center for Philosophy for Children was outgrowing its home at the University of Washington.

Becoming PLATO

In 2022, the Center for Philosophy for Children and PLATO formally merged under the name PLATO. Today, the organization carries forward the legacies of both founding institutions—deepening its impact and continuing to bring the pleasures and practices of philosophy to young people across the country and around the world.

30 Years, 30 Voices

To celebrate our 30th anniversary, 30 PLATO educators, students, and supporters will reflect on what PLATO has meant to them in a series of short videos over the course of the year. The first three feature PLATO supporters who have been connected with the organization for many years.

Click each photo to watch the video.



**ALEXANDRA
KISSEL**

Alexandra first encountered philosophy as a middle-school student in a PLATO class in 2004—an experience she credits with shaping the course of her life.



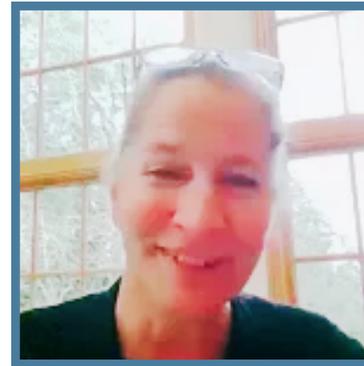
Alexandra
in 2004

She went on to earn a degree in computer science from Carnegie Mellon University and has spent the past fifteen years working in artificial intelligence and machine learning, including as an engineer, product leader, and the founder of her own venture-backed company, Rubber Ducky Labs.



**DAVID
SHAPIRO**

David has been part of PLATO from the beginning. Now a PLATO board member and a member of the Cascadia College faculty, he teaches college philosophy courses shaped by years of doing philosophy with young people. He is the author or co-author of six books, including *Plato Was Wrong! Footnotes on Doing Philosophy with Young People*, a compendium of activities for exploring philosophical questions in classrooms and beyond.



**SARA
GOERING**

Sara is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Washington, Seattle, and a member of PLATO's Academic Advisory Board. Connected to PLATO through the Center for Philosophy for Children since the late 1990s, she has helped advance philosophy in education across multiple settings. In 2003, Sara joined the University of Washington, working alongside Jana Mohr Lone and David Shapiro at the Center, where she has contributed to teacher education, philosophy for children courses, K-12 programs, and making the case for philosophy in schools.

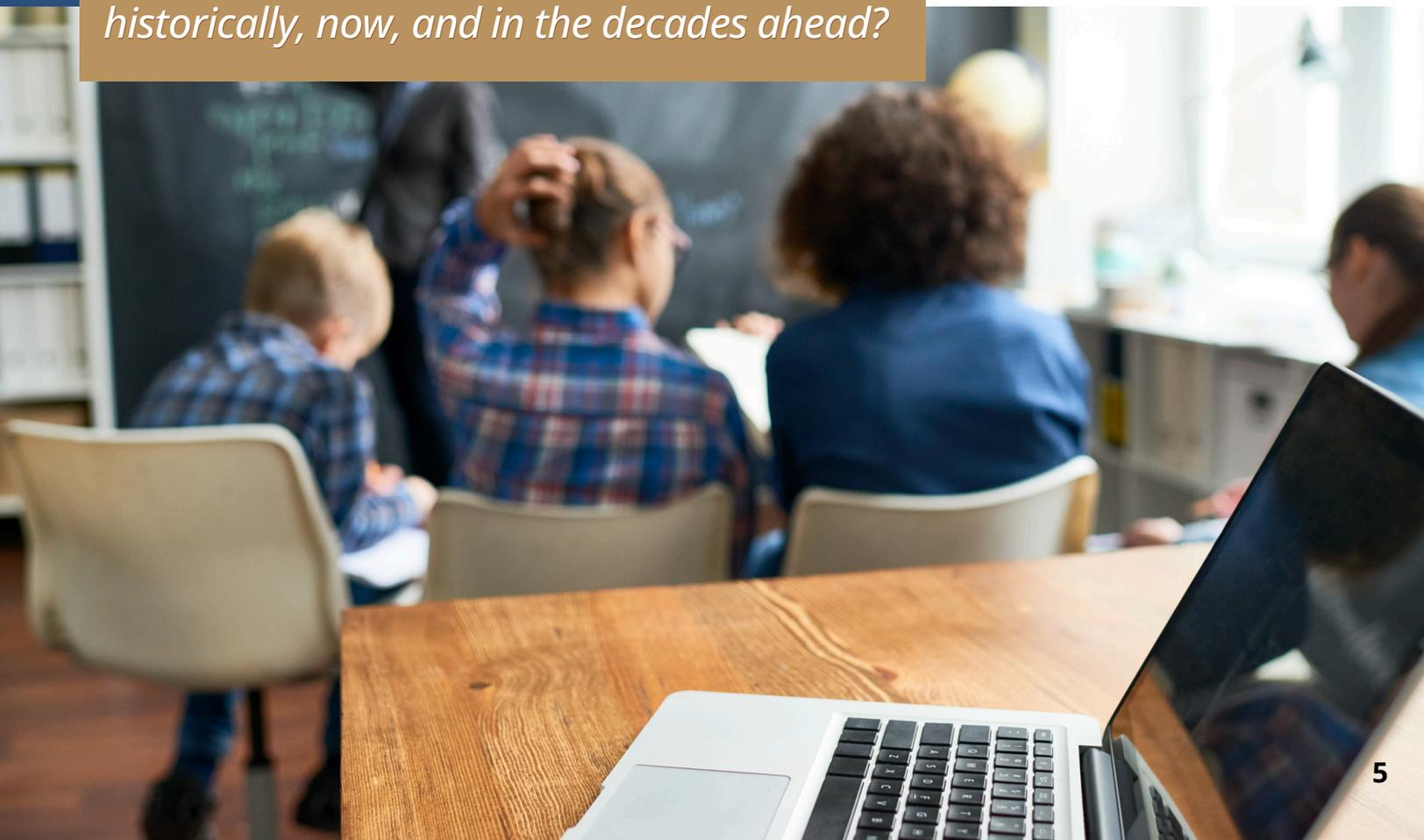
INITIATIVE 2026-2027: THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION

To celebrate PLATO's 30th anniversary, we are launching a yearlong signature initiative to investigate one essential and enduring question: **What are the purposes of education — historically, now, and in the decades ahead?**

This initiative stems from our commitment to create spaces for educators, students, and communities to ask and discuss complex, contested, and meaningful questions together.

In a rapidly changing global educational landscape—shaped by advances in artificial intelligence, shifting social and economic realities, and evolving expectations of schooling—PLATO seeks to support and encourage reflection: to consider how educational policies and systems have developed over time, to examine what they are being asked to do today, and to imagine how they may evolve.

*What are the purposes of education —
historically, now, and in the decades ahead?*



WHAT TO EXPECT

During the 2026–27 academic year, PLATO will host a series of 30 events inviting teachers, students, scholars, and members of the public from around the world into sustained philosophical conversation.

The initiative will feature a rich range of programs designed to engage diverse audiences and perspectives, including:

Kickoff Event

September webinar exploring the history of public education. Leading scholars will discuss the evolution of public schooling and the challenges it faces today.

PLATO's "Book for the Year"

A discussion series, featuring a book chosen by the PLATO community.

Professional Development

Free professional development seminars for teachers to think philosophically about education and their role in shaping it and materials for professional development communities designed for use in schools across the country.

Philosophy Across the Ages

Our intergenerational series inviting participants of all ages to explore questions such as What is most valuable about education? and What should schools teach?

Winter Webinar: "Why Go to College?"

Panelists from a range of higher-education institutions will reflect on the purpose and future of higher education.

Middle and High School Philosophy Courses

Philosophy courses for middle and high school students on topics such as personal identity and education, artificial intelligence and schooling, the meaning of being smart, and what is worth learning.

Questions: *Philosophy for Young People*

The 27th issue of Questions: Philosophy for Young People will be focused on the theme "Why go to school?"

Capstone Event

The initiative will culminate in an event at PLATO's 2027 8th Biennial Conference at Oberlin College.

The initiative will honor PLATO's impact over three decades while inviting the next generation of thinkers, educators, and communities to envision what a flourishing education system can be.



BOOK FOR THE YEAR

In 2026-2027, PLATO will choose a book about the purposes of education, to be read and discussed by the entire community. We need your help to choose it. Three virtual “book group meetings,” open to all, will be scheduled throughout the year, culminating in a large group discussion at the June 2027 Conference.

What book do you suggest? Complete this form to help us choose.

PLATO INITIATIVE
2026-2027
The Purposes of Education

SUSTAINING CIRCLE

Sustaining the Work That Grows Curious Minds

At PLATO, philosophy begins with children’s questions—the kind that stop us in our tracks and invite us to think more carefully about the world. Supporting this learning takes a community committed to nurturing curiosity.

That’s why we invite you to join PLATO’s Sustaining Circle of monthly donors. Monthly gifts build the reliable foundation that allows PLATO’s multifaceted work with students and teachers to grow and thrive.

Joining the Sustaining Circle is a simple but meaningful way to stand alongside young people as they practice thinking deeply and speaking carefully. With a monthly commitment of any amount, you help ensure that philosophy remains a living, accessible part of education—shaping young minds today and the communities they will build tomorrow.



JOIN US!



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

PHILOSOPHER-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

Dr. Wiebke-Marie Stock, a Maine philosopher in residence, reflects on her work.

Critical thinking? Listening skills? Ethical reasoning?



"Sometimes, an insightful remark makes me hold my breath." - Dr. Stock

"We need such a program, especially now," is the answer I get from almost everyone I talk to when I explain the Philosopher-in-Residence program we are building in Maine. At first there is a little worry about practicalities —students have full days and teachers hardly need more work. But we are offering support and enrichment for teachers as well as students. The enthusiasm from stakeholders has been great. Teachers, administrators, parents, and the public agree on how important it is to engage students in philosophical discussions.

What has worked best to get in the door: we promise to work together to promote critical thinking, creative thinking, and reasoning skills. How to distinguish good and bad reasons? How to listen to someone and engage with their ideas? How to disagree respectfully? The students in my classes enjoy the challenge of "big" questions or of an ethical dilemma. It is refreshing for them that philosophical questions are less settled than a mathematical equation. There is a hunger to discuss essential features of life: What is happiness? What is in our control? What is friendship? What is art? When is it okay to lie?

Sometimes, an insightful remark makes me hold my breath. Recently, I asked a group of third graders to order important needs. Most of them rank food and water, shelter, sleep and medical care very high. Some, however, argued that we need a purpose to even want to live, to even want to seek food and water and shelter. But what is a purpose in life? One girl gave the following explanation: A doctor or a nurse has the purpose to help people. The purpose of a painter is to bring beauty into the world.

Thanks to PLATO and all of you for bringing such opportunities to our children.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

STANFORD ONLINE HIGH SCHOOL

Founded by Patrick Suppes 20 years ago, PLATO Partner Organization Ambassador Stanford Online High School is an accredited independent school that has inspired thousands of intellectually adventurous students in dozens of countries with a rigorous curriculum built around its Philosophy Core sequence. Synchronous philosophy courses such as Human Nature and Society; History and Philosophy of Science; Democracy, Freedom, Justice, and the Law; and Critical Reading and Argumentation (among others) encourage students to develop and test beliefs as they integrate knowledge across disciplines, while also forming close bonds with each other and caring expert educators.

In addition to more traditional reading and writing assignments, projects like the moral experiment (in which seniors live for several days according to the tenets of a moral theory they choose from the options of virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and deontology and analyze their experience in writing) help bring philosophy to life. A newly implemented emphasis on intellectual virtues, such as humility and courage in one's ideas, fosters significant growth in character and outlook. The school is proud of what we have accomplished in the first two decades of our school's existence, and excited for much more to come.

PLATO is proud to partner with Stanford Online High School as they continue to demonstrate how philosophy can shape thoughtful, engaged learners—and are excited to see where the next decades of their work will lead.



PLATO Online Events

WINTER ROUNDTABLES

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY VS. TEACHING PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

JAN 15, 4-5 PM PT/7-8 PM ET - **VIRTUAL**

Dr. Karen Emmerman, PLATO Education Director

[Join us using this meeting link!](#)

DEVELOPING A PHILOSOPHICAL CULTURE AT HOME

JAN 29, 4-5 PM PT/7-8 PM ET - **VIRTUAL**

Dr. Scott Hershovitz, University of Michigan

[Join us using this meeting link!](#)

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

FEB 12, 4-5 PM PT/7-8 PM ET - **VIRTUAL**

Dr. Mary Marcus, Florida State University

[Join us using this meeting link!](#)

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY: PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

FEB 26, 4-5 PM PT/7-8 PM ET - **VIRTUAL**

Dr. Mitch Green, University of Connecticut

This roundtable is part of a PLATO series introducing educators to philosophy. A link to a reading will be posted on the roundtable webpage soon.

[Join us using this meeting link!](#)

PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING

MAR 12, 4-5 PM PT/7-8 PM ET - **VIRTUAL**

Dr. Jordan Sherry-Wagner, UW Robinson Center for Young Scholars

[Join us using this meeting link!](#)

SPRING ROUNDTABLES

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY: AESTHETICS

MAR 26, 4-5 PM PT/7-8 PM ET - **VIRTUAL**

Dr. Renee Conroy, Purdue University Northwest

This roundtable is part of a PLATO series introducing educators to philosophy. A link to a reading will be posted on the roundtable webpage soon.

[Join us using this meeting link!](#)

POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY

APR 9, 4-5 PM PT/7-8 PM ET - **VIRTUAL**

Dr. Jana Mohr Lone, PLATO Executive

Director, and **Roberta Israeloff**, Squire Family Foundation and Member, PLATO Board of Directors

[Join us using this meeting link!](#)

WEBINAR: BEING YOURSELF INSIDE MODERN DAY ABSURDITY

Feb 5, 4-5:30 PM PT/7-8:30 PM ET

VIRTUAL

With a panel of middle school and high school students from PLATO's Student Advisory Council

[Click here to register and learn more!](#)

PHILOSOPHY ACROSS THE AGES

Feb 10, 4-5:30 PM PT/7-8:30 PM ET

VIRTUAL

An intergenerational ethics event for older adults and high school students

[Click here to register and learn more!](#)

For more information
Contact us at:
info@plato-philosophy.org

www.plato-philosophy.org



MIDDLE SCHOOL ETHICS CASE ARCHIVE

The PLATO website now includes an [archive of cases](#) written for the Middle School Ethics Bowl since 2019. Special thanks to PLATO Partner Organization Kent Place School and the Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Writing Committee for compiling these cases.

PROGRAM DEADLINES

Professional Development Program

Registration is now open for PLATO's [Professional Development Program Introductory Course](#). Registration deadline is February 15, 2026.

Thinking about developing a philosophy program?

A 2026 PLATO grant can help. Our [Grants Program](#) funds innovative philosophy programs around the US. Application deadline is January 31, 2026.

PLATO has a generous scholarship policy. See our website to learn more and register.



OUR MISSION: PLATO nurtures young people's curiosity, critical thinking, and desire to explore big questions, through philosophy and ethics programs for students, educators, and families.

PLATO Now Magazine is published quarterly by Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO).

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PLATO is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing philosophy for and with young people through education, research, and community engagement.

Learn more at plato-philosophy.org