

AASL Best Apps for Teaching and Learning

By Cathy Potter

On June 25, 2016 the [AASL Best Apps for Teaching and Learning](#) were revealed at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida. The list of twenty-five apps is released annually by a committee of ten school librarians and professors from the American Association of School Librarians. Since the award started in 2013, the AASL has recognized [100 educational apps](#) that span all grade levels and content areas. Members of the 2016 AASL Best Apps committee spent the past year testing, reviewing and discussing apps in five categories: STEM, Books, Humanities & Arts, Content Creation and Organisation & Management. Committee members sought out innovative, low-cost apps that could be used in 21st century classrooms and libraries.

Five STEM apps were named to the 2016 list including [The Foos](#), a highly engaging app that teaches young children how to code and [Map of Life](#) a crowdsourcing app that collects data about plants and animals across the world. Users may report wildlife in their area or look for information about which species live in specific locations. The Books category included [Ryan North's To Be or Not to Be](#), a humorous, steampunk version of *Hamlet*, and [Epic! Unlimited Books for Kids](#), a platform for reading e-books. Teachers can sign up for a free *Epic!* educator account which provides students with access to thousands of e-books, audiobooks and educational videos. <https://www.getepic.com/educators>.

[Homes by Tinybop](#) was recognised in the Humanities & Arts category. The app takes students on tours of more than twenty homes from across the globe including a ger (yurt) in Mongolia and a Guatemalan adobe. [StoryCorps](#), another Humanities & Arts app, archives recording of interviews uploaded by the public. StoryCorps' mission is to "preserve and share humanities stories". The Content Creation category recognised six apps including [Canva](#), a design app for creating eye-catching presentations and infographics. [MusiQuest](#) teaches young children about music theory and composition using a kid-friendly approach. [Google Classroom](#) was a winner in the Organisation and Management category. The free app allows students and teachers to share documents, organise work, and provide instant feedback across platforms. [Post-It Plus](#) uses the camera on an iPad or iPhone to photograph and save notes and allows users to digitally organise and arrange the notes. Teachers and students will find this to be a useful tool for capturing ideas from brainstorming sessions.

The AASL Best Apps committee presented a second in-depth session at the ALA Annual Conference in June. During that session, committee members identified app trends and examined issues such as equity and the role of the school librarian in promoting and curating apps. Some of the trends the committee discussed included the rise of crowdsourcing apps, a decrease in the number of book apps released, an increase in content creation apps and the prevalence of apps that can be easily accessed across platforms (ex: [Microsoft Office Sway](#), [Adobe Spark Page](#), and [Google Classroom](#)). Joyce Valenza also shared with the audience how to 'smash apps' or use multiple apps together to create new products or complete tasks.

The entire list of 2016 Best Apps for Teaching and Learning and related resources can be found on the AASL website. <http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards/best/apps/2016>

The AASL encourages librarians to share the 2016 Best Apps for Teaching and Learning list with colleagues and students. Joyce Valenza created this Piktochart featuring video clips of committee members describing the apps. <https://magic.piktochart.com/output/14549120-bestapps16>.

Nominations are currently being accepted for the 2017 list. Visit the nomination page if you have an app you wish to nominate for next year's list: <http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards/best/apps/nom> list: <http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards/best/apps/nom>.

2016 AASL Best Apps for Teaching and Learning

Book Apps

- **Epic! Unlimited Books for Kids** by Epic! Creations, Inc.

- **Ryan North's To Be or Not to Be** by Tin Man Games
- **The Voyages of Aladdin and Sinbad** by Belmontis Publishers
- **Metamorphabet** by Vectorpark.com
- **Professor Astro Cat's Solar System** by Minilab Ltd.

Humanities & Arts

- **Newsela** by Newsela
- **StoryCorps** by StoryCorps, Inc
- **Homes** by Tinybop
- **Spies of Mississippi: The Appumentary** by Joe Zeff Design
- **MoMA Art Lab** by MoMA, the Modern Museum of Art

Content Creation

- **Canva** by Canva
- **Plotagon** by Plotagon
- **Adobe Spark Page** by Adobe
- **Office Sway** by Microsoft
- **Comic Life 3** by plasq LLC
- **MusiQuest** by Edify Technologies

Organization & Management

- **Microsoft OneNote** by Microsoft
- **Three Ring** by Three Ring Inc.
- **Post-it Plus** by 3M Company
- **Google Classroom** by Google

STEM

- **The Foos** by codeSpark
- **The Everything Machine** by Tinybop
- **Attributes by Math Doodles** by Carstens Studio Inc.
- **Earth Primer** by Chaim Gingold
- **Map of Life** by Map of Life

Cathy Potter is a school librarian at Falmouth Elementary School in Falmouth, Maine. She has served on the AASL Best Apps for Teaching and Learning committee for the past three years and was the chair of the committee from 2015-2016. Cathy is a National Board Certified Teacher with a background in literacy instruction. Cathy was a classroom teacher for twelve years before making the transition to the school library in 2007. She enjoys sharing her love of books and technology with students and teachers.