

# THE GENIUS HOUR GUIDEBOOK

A Resource Site for Passion,  
Wonder, & Inquiry in the Classroom



 Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

## The Genius Hour Guidebook Discussion Guide

### Chapter 1: “What Is Genius Hour, and Why Do Students Need it?”

1. Genius Hour is the name we chose to call our inquiry- and passion-based personal learning block. We take a stab at defining Genius Hour (p. 1), but what definition would *you* give for this type of learning? Is there someone with whom you should share that definition? Colleagues in education? Parents? Students? On your own blog?
2. Reflect on this statement: “Companies...know that good things emerge if people are given space to be autonomous and work on things they are passionate about – indeed, many of the best innovations come not from management, but from the workers. Or, to use an educational analogy, the best learning comes not from the teacher, but directly from the students.” (p. 4) Would you agree? Why or why not?
3. On page 5 we’ve listed several benefits of Genius Hour. What potential benefits would you add to the list?
4. What other names have you heard used for Genius Hour learning? What name do you call it or would you like to call it when you start? (p. 8)

### Chapter 2: “Introducing Genius Hour to Your Class”

1. On pages 14-15 we talk about some of our favorite videos and picture books we’ve used to introduce Genius Hour. Which are your favorites? Have you used these or other creativity “prompts” as part of Genius Hour or in a different subject/part of class?
2. What are some of your best ideas for building your classroom into a community of learners? (p. 16) How about writing a blog post to share those ideas with others?
3. How much direction might you give your students when they are brainstorming ideas? Should “anything go” in the brainstorming step?
4. How have you introduced open inquiry in the past? What went well?
5. When you get to Step 3, creating an inquiry question (p. 20), how might you help students sort through the brainstormed ideas?
6. Would you agree that we should help students broaden ideas that are too easy to “Google” as they make inquiry questions for Genius Hour? Or should we let them be satisfied with Googling the answer? (p. 21) Do you have examples of Googable and non-Googable inquiry questions your students have come up with in your classroom?

### **Chapter 3: “The Launch: Diving In and Letting Go”**

1. In what ways are you “the chief learner in the classroom”? In what ways do you still need to learn to let go and let students take greater ownership of their learning?
2. On page 29 we share the KWLHAQ chart. Have you ever used a KWL chart? What do you think about this modern-day version? In what subject areas would it work best?
3. What if one or two students are just not engaged? Read the sidebar about Joy Kirr’s student on pages 32-34. There are several suggestions given for helping disinterested students become more involved. Which of these suggestions have you tried or do you think might work in your classroom? What other successes have you had in helping students become engaged learners during Genius Hour or other learning times?
4. Rules in Genius Hour are few, but some ground rules are important. What are the “non-negotiables” that might be important for you and your students during Genius Hour?
5. Read Jason’s story, starting on page 35. Brainstorm how Genius Hour can benefit your students who are in the special education program. How will Genius Hour benefit gifted students? How does Genius Hour benefit all students and teachers?
6. What other types of inquiry do you do with your class? How have your students benefited from this type of learning? How does Genius Hour compare?

### **Chapter 4: “Loosening Deadlines and Sharing Passions”**

1. We list the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Students on page 44:
  - a. Creativity and Innovation
  - b. Communication and Collaboration
  - c. Research and Information Fluency
  - d. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making
  - e. Digital Citizenship
  - f. Technology Operations and ConceptsWhich of these standards might be addressed in Genius Hour and how? If you already have Genius Hour in your classroom, which one(s) have you noticed are lacking? How can you help your students demonstrate their growth in these areas, either during Genius Hour or otherwise?
2. Look at your school’s curriculum standards. Specifically note the standards at your grade level and/or subject areas. Which of these standards have the potential to be practiced and demonstrated during Genius Hour? Plan to make a note of these and share them with your school’s stakeholders to show the value of Genius Hour in the curriculum.
3. On page 49 we talk about how some Genius Hour projects benefit from access to technology, but that many do not need tech. What types of projects are your students doing? How have you provided them with the tech (or other materials) that they need for their Genius Hour or other exploratory projects?

## **Chapter 5 “Helping Kids Make Their Learning Visible”**

1. On page 51 we say, “We want our students to make their learning visible, to share with the world.” How do/might your students share their Genius Hour learning? How about the other things that they are learning about, outside of Genius Hour?
2. Do your students blog? What do you see as the benefits of blogging? If your students don’t yet blog, how might you identify and tackle the obstacles that keep them from doing it?
3. If individual student blogs aren’t an option, how can you use a class blog to help students make their learning visible?
4. Are you being transparent and making your own learning visible by blogging about your teaching practice? Why or why not? And if not, what would it take to get started?
5. There is a sample list of online sharing tools on page 55. What are some ways you publish students’ work online? What are some ways you want to try in the future?

## **Chapter 6: “Teaching about Self-Assessment and Feedback”**

1. In this chapter we talk about the importance of formative assessment. What does formative assessment mean to you? How does it differ from summative? What are the go-to formative assessments that you use with your class? How do they inform your teaching, and how do they give students timely, detailed, meaningful feedback?
2. How do/would you assess Genius Hour? Why?
3. John Dewey said, “We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience.” How does this relate to Genius Hour and/or other learning that happens in your classroom?
4. What are ways that you have helped or want to help your students reflect more deeply about their own work? Get feedback from peers? Teachers? Experts? Do you or would you make time for this in the Genius Hour process?
5. We need to teach children how to self-assess and peer-assess. Do you have any successful experiences to share about teaching these important skills?
6. Think about one of your own “passion projects,” something you do because you love it: baking, gardening, photography, scrapbooking, soccer, calligraphy, martial arts, etc. See pages 65-66. When would it be okay to be given a grade for this work?

## **Chapter 7: “What Can We Do to Improve the World?”**

1. “Genius Hour helps us become producers and makers, not just consumers” (p. 69). What have your students created that moved them beyond “consumership”?
2. What does the makerspace movement mean to you? Is it a part of your school’s culture? (To learn more about it, see this Edutopia article by Vicki Davis: <http://edut.to/1u0ODJD>)
3. In what ways have your students used their Genius Hour or other exploratory projects to identify and then try to alleviate a problem or meet a need?
4. One of Gallit’s students thought about becoming an IT technician as a result of his Genius Hour project (pages 76-78). Have you had any students who began to consider

future careers as a result of pursuing Genius Hour or similar projects? Do you have examples of projects that made you wonder about the future your student might have in a certain field?

## **Chapter 8: “Adding All Our Voices to the Genius Hour Movement”**

1. If you've already tried Genius Hour in your classroom, what changes have you seen in your classroom learning environment? Based on your experiences, what would you say to colleagues who have yet to try Genius Hour?
2. If you have Genius Hour in your classroom, have you asked your students why Genius Hour matters to them? If not, what do you think they would say?
3. Are you on Twitter? Try the #geniushour chat on the first Thursday of the month to meet new people and grow your PLN. (The Twitter chat is at 6 pm Pacific Time, 9 pm Eastern Time. See: [www.geniushour.wikispaces.com](http://www.geniushour.wikispaces.com).) If you aren't on Twitter, consider joining. It's a great way to expand your personal learning network. Need help? Check out *The Teacher's Guide to Twitter*: <http://bit.ly/1aitYCj>

## **Appendices**

1. What answers in the Genius Hour FAQs section were most helpful to you? What else do you wonder about? (Visit the Genius Hour Guidebook website to find even more answers and ideas about Genius Hour: <http://www.geniushourguide.org/> )
2. Have you read any of the books and blogs listed in Appendix C? If so, how about blogging about one of them and sharing what you have learned?
3. Which books and blogs would you add to these lists? Share them on social media with your PLN.
4. We are so happy that Joy Kirr wrote the afterword for our book. If you've already launched Genius Hour, did you relate to the pitfalls she described? How have you coped?
5. We see Genius Hour as a step toward more student-centered, inquiry-based, meaningful learning. What else do you do in your classroom that supports this way of learning?
6. What questions do you still have? How will you go about finding answers?

### ***For more information and engagement:***

- Follow Gallit (@gallit\_z) and Denise (@mrsdkrebs) on Twitter.
- Sign up for the Genius Hour Guidebook newsletter ([www.geniushourguide.org/](http://www.geniushourguide.org/))
- Visit Denise's blog, *Dare to Care* (<http://mrsdkrebs.edublogs.org/>)
- Visit Gallit's blog, *Integrating Technology & Genius Hour* (<http://www.gallitzvi.com/>)

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