

VIEW



Reema



Faraz :)



Connecting..

A YEAR IN ZOOM

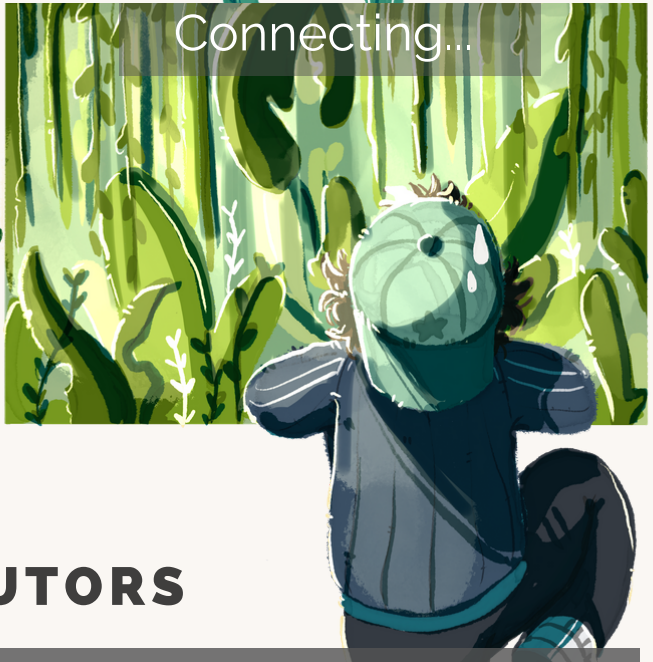
Arshiaa



Vincenzo



Connecting..



**STORIES BY
FRIENDS OF SIMON TUTORS**



**SHARE
SCREEN**

**END
MEETING**

Artwork By: Rania Abulaziz and Laurryssa Toews

SPRING 2021

INTRODUCTION

Friends of Simon (FOS) is a signature community engagement initiative within the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. FOS selects outstanding and caring university students and trains them to become professional tutors and mentors to a rising generation of newcomer Canadians. Since its establishment in 2006, the program has served thousands of immigrant, refugee, and other at-risk K-12 students by supporting growth in literacy, numeracy, and study skills. Our tutors serve as role models in the community, and they help to foster academic values in their school-aged tutees.

In March 2020, British Columbia's schools were closed and tutoring, as we knew it, was suspended. The tutors ached and worried for their students, but were required to wait for schools to give the go-ahead to connect with them. While they waited, they created "We Miss You" videos that were then delivered to their housebound tutees. These powerful messages of hope helped to create pathways to reconnection. One by one our students were able to log onto Zoom sessions to reconnect with their beloved tutors.

In those very early days, it became clear that many of our newcomer families needed help to navigate the technology. With this in mind, our tutors rolled up their sleeves and got to work. Under the skillful guidance of our very own technology whiz-kid, Elliot Fang, FOS created a library of Zoom User Manuals, videos, and infographics translated into 18 different languages. Our multi-lingual tutors provided in-house translation services, while grandparents, parents, and other relatives were enlisted to double-check grammar and word usage. This project galvanized our tutors as they resolutely knocked down barriers that were faced by our newcomer families. With the help of Rogers, SFU Tech Collection and Distribution Initiative, and individual donations, we were able to provide tablets and computers to 20 families in the community. By the end of May, before schools had resumed in-class instruction, we were already working to support over 80 students in the community. At the beginning of September, we increased this number to 181 students. These children and youth have received regular weekly tutoring support over the course of this Year in Zoom.

In this booklet, FOS tutors share stories that will give you a glimpse of their lived, in-the-moment experiences with their students while tutoring via Zoom. These stories, full of hope and empathy, are written from the heart. We want to thank and acknowledge **Rose Rai** and **Satveer Ladhar** for their leadership in assembling our stories and editing this booklet. We also want to thank **Rania Abdulaziz** and **Laurysa Toews** for their beautiful artwork.

Additional Tutor Reflections can be read online at: <http://www.sfu.ca/fostutor/stories.html>
Or you may watch Tutor Videos at: <http://www.sfu.ca/fostutor/videos.html>

We hope, in reading these stories of ordinary moments that unfold in the daily work of our tutors, that your spirits will be lifted. As we support each other during these challenging times, we are grateful for the extraordinary efforts of our tutors who reach out to the students virtually and continue to support them.

Please stay safe and healthy.

Kanwal Neel and Angela Flumerfelt

Coordinators, Friends of Simon

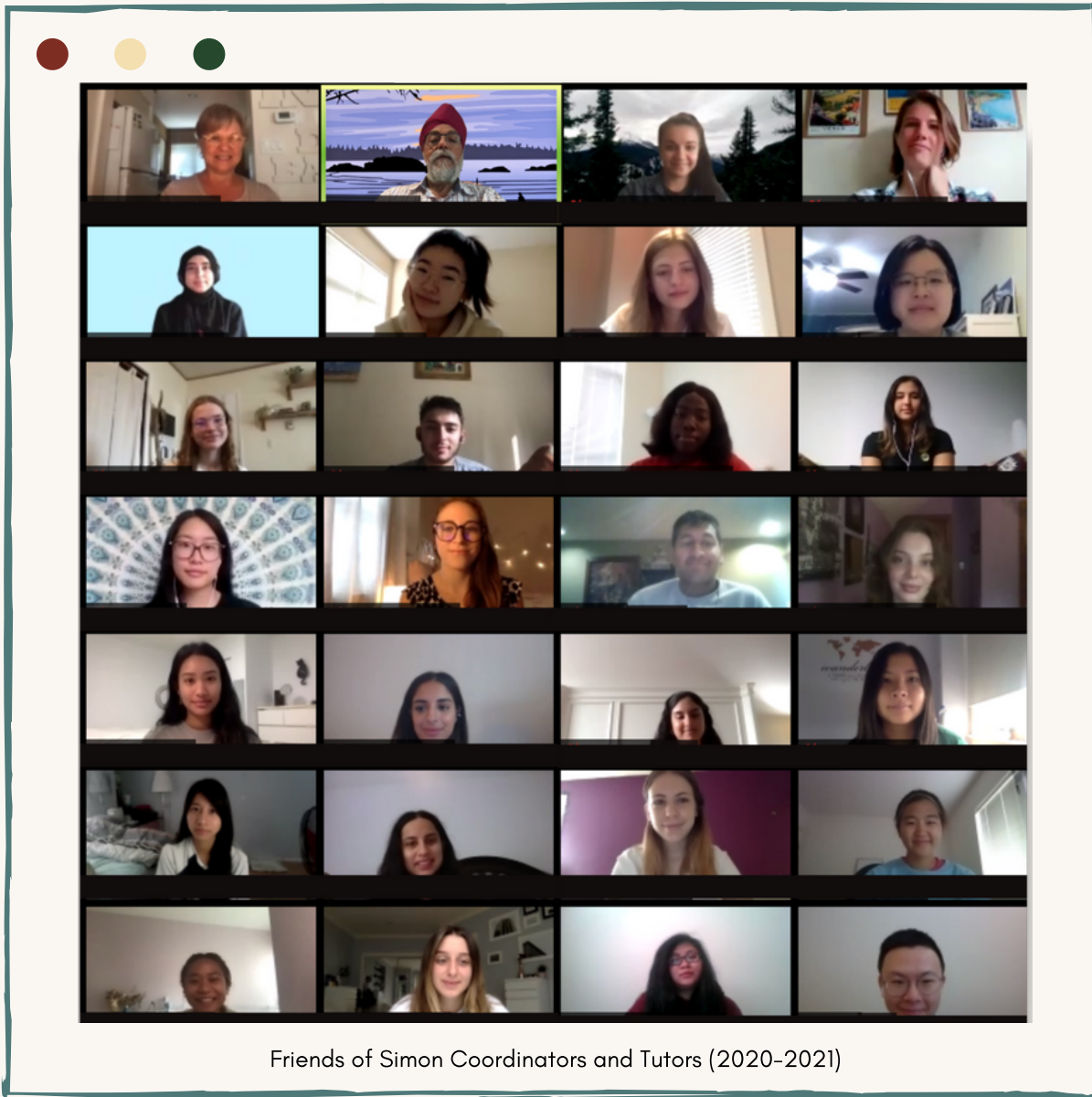
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May 2021

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A YEAR IN ZOOM

**SHARE
STORY**



A Chance to Shine

Written By: Christina Lim

Christina Lim is completing her undergraduate degree in Education. She hopes to become an elementary school teacher one day, as she has a strong passion for working with children and helping others. In her spare time, Christina loves going to concerts, travelling, and spending time with animals.

I first met Eleanor two years ago. I remember her as an incredibly shy student, who rarely initiated contact with others. Not only was she shy, but her voice was also very quiet. Often, when she had something to say, her voice would become overpowered by the other students.

Although Eleanor never approached me, I made sure to check in with her every session to see how she was doing, and to help her with her homework. While she eventually opened up to me a little, I always felt that she still held back a small part of herself and her personality.

The semester ends and I don't get a chance to work at the same site until a year later, on Zoom. I encounter Eleanor again, but something is different. It is clear that she is more confident as she eagerly turns on her camera to greet my familiar face. Although it was difficult to hear her soft voice in-person, in an online setting, her microphone picks up her voice loudly and clearly. Now, her voice dominates the Zoom meeting and her personality shines like I've never seen it shine before.

Perhaps she has gained more confidence over the past year, or perhaps she feels more comfortable socializing from behind a screen. Regardless, it is a wonderful and drastic change, and I feel like I finally see her true self for the first time.

I sit back, amazed, as she explains the rules of a game that she wants to play to the tutors and the other students.

Maybe Friends of Simon online does have its advantages.





A New Love For Reading!

Written By: Marisa Dristas

Marisa Dristas has completed a Bachelor of General Studies in Education with three minors and has recently received acceptance into the Professional Development Program (PDP) at Simon Fraser University. She plans to complete her Early Childhood Certificate (ECE) and Montessori training in the future. In her spare time, Marisa enjoys staying active.

How many children truly like reading?

Well, at Friends of Simon, I have found it quite common for kids to complain and moan at the start of the year, when we say we are going to read.

For example, Faraz wasn't too interested in reading. He was much more interested in participating in literacy activities or the end of session wrap-up games. Although I can't complain there, it was often that he would say "Ugh, reading again", or "I don't want to read" when it was reading time.

When hearing this, I made sure to encourage Faraz and find ways to make reading more fun. I would reply to him with things like "Come on, reading is fun!" or "You're getting so much better, let's see this week's improvement". I would also offer to split the page with him just to get him to read at least a little.

Even in my greatest attempts, Faraz wasn't too excited and made that very clear. He often opted out to listen or only read the 'easier' pages.

It wasn't until a few weeks into the year where I was able to hone in on each child's interests.

Interestingly enough, I was more often than not placed with 3 to 4 children that love dinosaurs. Like LOVE dinosaurs.

With this new information, I curated a whole line-up of different books on dinosaurs that were their reading level. The collection ranged between books that explored different facts about dinosaurs, which dinosaurs would win in a fight, truth or lie books, Jurassic World and National Geographic books, and even fictional stories with dinosaur characters.

Now, with this collection, I got the children's attention, specifically Faraz'. Suddenly, everyone was extremely interested in reading.

Faraz was amazed at the assortment of books I had borrowed from the online library, so much so, he couldn't even make a decision about which to read first!

That said, after finally choosing a book to read, Faraz was constantly asking to read the next page, even out of his turn!

"Can I read this one", "I wanna read this one too", is what I heard during the duration of reading time.

I was thrilled to see how enthusiastic he was to read.

Now, every time I am with Faraz to read, he is overjoyed and can't wait until it is his turn!

I make sure to find new dinosaur books each week to keep him engaged and entertained.

I am so glad I was able to find something that he enjoys and turn it into moments of learning and growth!





A Shared Experience

Written By: Rose Rai

Rose Rai is completing her undergraduate degree in Psychology and a minor in Counselling and Human Development. She hopes to pursue a career as a Registered Clinical Counsellor to support families and children. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, yoga, and spending time with her family.

It was another successful virtual tutoring session on a Tuesday afternoon with a great team of tutors and students. Except, this time I would be a little sleep deprived and coming from writing a midterm exam on another Zoom meeting.

I joined fifteen minutes into the session and missed the “Question of the Day”, but just in time for my breakout group session with three students. I read with them every week. The lead tutor had let them know ahead of time the reason behind my late arrival.

Hanna excitedly asks, “How did your test go?”

“We missed you for the question of the day,” says Marisa.

“I missed hearing your responses and thank you for asking, I think it went well” I respond.

“I always feel stressed and look for the right answer after a test. Do you do that as well?” asks Hanna.

“Yeah, I do! I’ll probably do that after our session” I say as I sympathize with them.

Nora is usually hesitant to unmute and share her thoughts in the breakout group, but today she chimed in and expressed how she feels upset when she looks for the right answers after a test and they don’t match the responses she selected.

At that moment, those students trusted me and shared a common experience with me. Building trust to share such experiences and being kind of like an older sibling to these students is at the heart of our work and what we call relationship building.

These students were amazed that I wrote tests and worried about my marks just like they did. I observed how this shared experience gave them a kind of “sigh of relief” that they are not alone. As humans, we like to relate to one another and that is what Friends of Simon allows students and tutors to do. How awesome is that?





April 7th, 2020

Written By: Amanda Cordeiro

Amanda Cordeiro is a Lead Tutor and a Program Assistant for Friends of Simon. She has just finished her final semester of her undergraduate degree. She will be graduating with a Bachelor of Arts and Social Sciences with a focus in History. She will be going into a Teaching Professional Development Program in September.

As a Friends of Simon Lead Tutor, the foundation of my role is to create a successful learning environment for my students. Both Angela and Kanwal instilled that building relationships with students were essential to developing programs where children could grow and be successful. In February of 2020, high-fives, unique handshakes, and everyone's it-tag were vital in creating a culture where my students could connect with me and the educational environment. I never imagined that the foundation of those strategies, those high-fives and fist bumps, would ever have to be excluded from my work.

When COVID-19 broke out, Friends of Simon's in-person program halted indefinitely. Angela asked if I would like to pilot the online tutoring program. I was thrilled, excited, and nervous. I would be working with two students I had previously had at my elementary school site. They were recent immigrants to Canada and were working on English and reading skills.

I had never worked with such young students through an online platform. I did not know what their technological literacy was or what kind of resources they would have at home. My biggest concern was what strategies would recreate our in-person classroom and those in-person relationships? I knew my ability to connect with my students through an online platform was essential in creating a successful experience.

As I prepared for my first session, I had pulled every in-person resource I had ever used and tried to make it fit into an online platform. My room became a library for children's books and educational resources. These strategies became the basis for my new plan. On April 7th, 2020, I launched my first Zoom call with Lisa and Lily. Smiles lit up the room from ear to ear as we greeted each other for the first time in weeks.

But nothing would prepare me for what happened next...

Disastrous is the only thing I can accurately describe our first few sessions being. Strategies that had become second nature in-person were completely useless over *Zoom*. Classroom management strategies like teacher proximity to get the girls to focus were unsuccessful. I could not anticipate the *Zoom* exhaustion, numerous interruptions, and the girls' gymnastic and dance routines they wanted to show me. Lisa, Lily, and I were learning from each other on how to interact through this strange online platform.

Quickly, I had to reevaluate how I planned my sessions and go back to the basics. My learning environment and relationship with the girls had changed, which meant my strategies had to change. I recognized that it was essential to directly engage with the girls' interests to reconnect and rebuild a successful educational environment over *Zoom*. I knew that I had to reinvent and recreate new ways of being with my students, but how?

I began preparing "shape of the day" *PowerPoints* that were often inspired by the colour pink. My senior cat made regular guest appearances as motivation to keep the girls on track and focused. My online classroom always had time for a dance break and books about *Frozen* became a weekly ritual. These strategies founded and built a thriving educational environment for Lisa and Lily. They were more attentive, and slowly we could recreate our tutor-student relationship that we had built in-person months before.

Our successful online classroom became the highlight of my week for the next few months. During the height of the pandemic, our little online classroom became a space where we all laughed, smiled, and enjoyed some normalcy of the pre-pandemic days.

As the weeks went on, our classroom began to grow. By the end of the school year, our online classroom had a full class list and team of tutors. Even as we grew, we continued to hold the foundation of relationship building at the core of our lesson planning.

As I said good-bye to all of my students that final session before summer, I knew that our Tuesday Friends of Simon Classroom had become everything I had hoped for. It became a space where tutors and students could grow and learn together. It was a space where we explored interests and built relationships. It became a space that once reflected our in-person classroom. With tears welling up in my eyes, and a huge smile I felt the success of the program.

Friends of Simon during COVID-19 showcased teaching's real challenges. The foundation of education and successful child development is based on the relationships educators build with the child and their community. By fostering positive relationships and communities, we get to influence a child's success. Being even a small part of that process drives my purpose as an individual. The Friends of Simon Program inspired my passion and purpose. As I end my career with Friends of Simon and graduate this year, I will forever hold onto the memories of my online classroom, and the first Zoom call that sparked this amazing journey.

April 7th, 2020.

Nothing could have prepared me for everything I would learn...





Beyond Stars

Written By: Brianna Condilenios

Brianna Condilenios is pursuing a major in History and a minor in Counselling and Human Development. She hopes to fuse her passion for working with children with her passion for exploring the world by teaching in different countries. Brianna adores travelling, learning new languages, tea, and writing poetry.

When I sat down to write this story, I tried to recall a single unique tutoring experience that shined a bit brighter than all the others. I hummed and I hawed while staring at a blank screen. How on Earth can I select a single moment at FOS that outshines the others? Then I realized that this writing approach was simply not going to work for me.

Every FOS session is filled with so much value. Whether that is elementary school children beaming with excitement at funny household objects that they found for a Zoom scavenger hunt, or a flopped lesson plan with disengaged preteens. We enjoy the oh so satisfying moments of student exuberance, while supporting one another when students roll their eyes with boredom at our thoroughly thought out lesson plans. Not every experience in teaching is a glistening star kind of moment and that is okay.

The funny thing is, the trust we have built with our students rears its heads in very subtle ways. Like when Harper and Chelsea had the vulnerability to show me the short stories they wrote. Or when Vincenzo, a middle school student who never failed to light up the tutors' faces with laughter, confided in one tutor he had no friends at school, and Friends of Simon was a safe place for him. Or how about when high school seniors Damien and Yusuf could admit that they do not know a word and would like help pronouncing it?

All of these examples illustrate how important it is to build an environment of safety for our students to learn and grow in. We work hard to build meaningful connections with our students. Sometimes that is directly messaging students who are always muted during conversations and asking them what their opinion is. Sometimes it is choosing a Kahoot based on topics that the kids LOVE. We pour care into reflecting on how we can improve for next time. We infuse passion, laughter and respect into how we interact with students, site coordinators, and co-workers.

So at the end of the day, there is no single twinkling star. Instead, we have a galaxy of stars that illuminates the lives of those who enter into the astonishing orbit that is Friends of Simon.





Booster Seat Bingo

Written By: Teanna Lackner

Teanna Lackner is currently completing her undergraduate degree in the French Cohort Program in Public and International Affairs. She is passionate about making a positive impact in her community and helping others. In her spare time, Teanna enjoys reading, watching movies, and spending time with her family.

We are not sure if we are going to have high attendance today as it is our last session before summer break. But lo and behold at 3'oclock all of our students have popped up on my screen including Hassan, who seems to have a different background than usual. He's sitting in his booster seat holding his mum's phone while she drives him home.

"I can't miss Friends of Simon!" he explains with excitement as he sees all of his friends' faces.

"Pull out your pencils and paper" I instruct the students "We're going to play Bingo!"

My earphones are filled with squeals of joy as the students prepare their Bingo sheets.

"But I don't have a piece of paper or pencil" Hassan mumbles while his head moves to the corner of the screen as his mum turns a tight corner.

"That's okay Hassan. I'll be your...attorney representative and will write down everything for you!" Jaden, one of our tutors, cleverly explains.

Hassan's face lights up and eagerly agrees to the proposal. Within 10 minutes Jaden yells "BINGO!" on behalf of his client Hassan of course.





Definitely There

Written By: Maya Naidu

Maya Naidu is completing her undergraduate degree in Health Sciences with a Certificate in Liberal Arts. She is pursuing a career in medicine and is interested in public health. In her spare time, Maya has been experimenting with making café drinks, re-learning the flute, and connecting to her heritage through studying Japanese. She also enjoys long walks outside while listening to podcasts.

One unique challenge of online tutoring is that, sometimes, you wonder if your students are really even there.

On a hot Spring afternoon, I am experiencing exactly this situation - all four students are muted, with their camera off, and not a word in the messaging chat. Another tutor and I are with a group of four high school students who have no homework at all. We have some activities prepared, but we always make sure to see if the students have something in mind that they would like to do first.

So, as usual, to the four black squares on our screen, we ask “is there an activity that you want to do or a topic you want to discuss today?”, not really expecting any answers. As expected, we are met with silence, and I open the file on my computer with the activity we have ready, hoping that the students really are there today.

Just as I am about to start, we hear a voice “actually... can we talk about the periodic table?”

I am a little taken aback, but I automatically respond, “YES! I would LOVE to talk about the periodic table!” I see the other tutor break a smile at my over-excitement.

I am not only excited that I get to talk about my favourite subject science, but that the students asked to learn about science, and such a specific topic at that! I must admit, I had some trouble containing my enthusiasm and pulling together a quick lesson on the spot.

For the next 30 minutes, we talk about where to find the elements of the periodic table in real life, why helium balloons float, and the history of some elements such as Californium (named after the State of California). After the session ends, I realize with a jolt that I forgot to show them the periodic table song!*

**The periodic table song is a catchy song which recites the elements of the periodic table to the tune of "Can-Can" music.*





Note: The same character but in a different round, explained by Yazen and drawn by Rania Abdulaziz.

Determined to Share

Written By: Rania Abdulaziz

Rania Abdulaziz is in her third year of Interactive Art and Technology at Simon Fraser University. She hopes to become a concept artist and illustrator for animation movies and video games to help bring a more diverse set of characters to future generations.

Through tutoring children at a community learning centre, I have the privilege to see many kids from different backgrounds, cultures, and education levels interact and showcase what they have experienced.

This is always an enriching activity for both the tutors and the students, yet not everyone is eager to join-in at first. The English level required to be able to explain something no-one else has experienced is higher than what some of our students have. This is the case for a particular student named Yazen. Yazen is very quiet and you almost never see him turn on his camera other than the first three minutes of the session just to say “hi” to the tutors. None of the fellow tutors at this site knew much about him other than his English level is low, he never had homework, he never wanted to participate and he never turned on his camera.

After the first three sessions, I became very curious about the mysterious kid that was always on time, always said hi and always stayed on mute. It became a little project of mine to get him to at least keep his camera on, so I started to call on him whenever he was in my breakout room to talk to me or share his thoughts on the current activity. As the day went on he started to become more comfortable and he didn’t mute himself for the rest of the session. From my tutoring team’s notes, I gathered that he likes superheroes and is very proud of his heritage.

I hatched a plan to use this in the next activity to get him to participate! The plan was to play a game that required the first player to pick a character (animation or video games that the other player might or might not know) and proceed to explain the steps of how to draw it using basic shapes to the second player without disclosing the actual character or where it's from. The second player would listen intently and draw out what was being explained to them on the Zoom whiteboard. At the end of the round, the character would be shown and the player that chose the character would explain who this character is (if no one knows them). This allows for the kids to choose something they like and practice thinking in abstract, while also speaking English for a prolonged amount of time.

While explaining the game to my no-homework group, Yazen turned on his camera and started to ask questions to clarify the exact rules of the game. He wanted to know if the character chosen by player one could be something player two didn't know about (the answer was yes). This was very new for Yazen and I was already counting this day as a win, but I had no idea it was going to get even better. As the game went on, Yazen interacted with other kids, helped them understand instructions, and even helped give character ideas to others. He was such a beaming kid! It was time for the last round and it was only fitting that Yazen chooses a character for me to draw, he wanted to make it very hard for me and the other students supported him in that decision. He stated that it was a character that I would never guess and the round began.

I have to be honest, I had no idea what I was drawing, for a good chunk of the round I thought I was drawing Shaun the Sheep but when all the instructions Yazen had for me were given and the round was over he told me that the character I attempted to draw was a sheep from the Chinese cartoon Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf (I would have never guessed). Yazen lit up and started to explain to me the concept of the show and how he watched it since he was young, saw all the movies, and loved every episode. Even with his growing English vocabulary, he did his best to use hand gestures, creativity, and occasionally a translator to get his point across.

I was amazed by the sheer determination this kid had to share his beloved childhood cartoon with me and the class. I thought I was the only one that was this passionate about cartoons! He asked to play this game again and if he could share some more about his interests and I couldn't be happier to say yes. Online tutoring is difficult and has its many challenges but when you come across a moment like this, all the struggles become worth it ten times over.





Impact from a Distance

Written By: Anonymous

It's a typical day at Friends of Simon on Zoom. After finishing up with our reading groups, it's time for our literacy activity; Today, we are playing Scattergories. We give the students a category, and they must write down one word for each letter of the alphabet (as much as they can complete in two minutes).

The first round is simple, "body parts"; We are very impressed with how many words the students could come up with in such a short time. However, the following category is a little bit more thought-provoking. The category is "things that make you happy." The students frantically write as many words as they can within two minutes. When the timer goes off, the students take turns reading out what they wrote for this category.

To our surprise, almost every student put "Friends of Simon" as something that makes them happy. Being told that the students enjoy our sessions fills my heart with so much joy, knowing that we can create a fun, positive, and educational space where we can all connect, despite only seeing each other through a computer screen. It's challenging to gauge what kind of impact we are making on students through Zoom, but moments like these remind us that we ARE forming relationships and making a real impact on students, even from a distance.





It Only Takes One

Written By: Kimia Pourshaban Oshibi

Kimia Pourshaban Oshibi is an undergraduate student studying Biomedical Physiology. She is passionate about access to health services, and equity in health for all members of the community. Kimia enjoys skiing, weightlifting and crocheting.

"One person can make a difference, and everyone should try." John F. Kennedy

All my own memories as an immigrant teenager come rushing back to me when the site coordinator, Margaret tells me about Shideh. A student in grade 12, who recently immigrated to Canada from my country and is struggling. She tells me that Shideh feels intimidated by her English class and is unmotivated to try. I am instantly transported to my first English class in high school and being asked to write a comparative analysis. Two words so utterly unfamiliar to me. I felt intimidated and unmotivated too.

Margaret convinces Shideh to attend our sessions by telling her that I speak her native language too. Shideh only comes to our session once, and she has only turned her video on for a few minutes. I have barely seen her face, let alone have a one-on-one conversation. There are very few things as good as a face-to-face conversation when you are trying to build a relationship with someone.

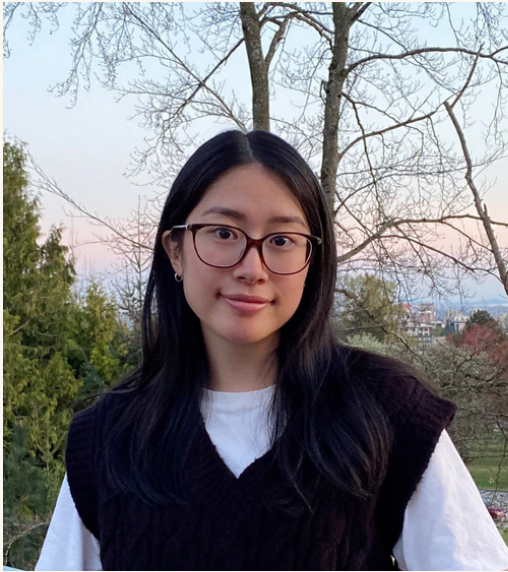
After a few sessions, Spring break rolls around, and a new term starts. At our first session after the break, Margaret tells me that Shideh came to her office today. She holds up a beautiful painting of a rocky beach, and a billowing ocean, that Shideh has made for her. The painting is to thank Margaret for convincing her to come to FOS sessions.

"Shideh is doing so well in her classes and is not struggling anymore. She told me she feels so much more confident in her English after coming to Friends of Simon."

After the session ends, I feel a sense of peace. It is refreshing to know that I could make a difference, even if it was only over a screen, looking at a black box.

I smile, knowing that a few years ago, someone helped me with my struggles. Today, I helped Shideh. I only hope that Shideh feels inspired to do the same one day.





It's In Your Name!

Written By: Emerly Liu

Emerly Liu completed her undergraduate degree in Education in Spring 2021 with minors in Early Learning, Learning and Developmental Disabilities, and Curriculum and Instruction. Emerly is a strong advocate for human rights and inclusive and accessible learning. In her spare time, she enjoys baking, reading, and listening to music.

"CANDY! How do you spell candy?" I ask Arshia. Arshia pronounces the hard "c" sound, /k/, and exclaims, "C!"

"You are right!" I say and write the letter "C" on the virtual whiteboard.

"What makes the /ă/ sound?" I wonder aloud. Arshia mouths the sound repeatedly to himself before guessing, "O."

"Not quite, try again — /ă/" I reply.

"It's in your name!" Yunus hints. Arshia pauses and confidently answers, "A."

"Yes, good job!" I smile. From thereon, Arshia successfully sounds out "N" and "D" with ease but gets stumped on the "Y."

"It's in my name!" Yunus giggles, and we all laugh.

As I watch Yunus help Arshia in this endearing way, I am both touched and impressed by their teamwork.





Limitless Literacy

Written By: Eleni Papadoulis

Eleni Papadoulis has completed her fourth year of Bachelor of General Studies in Education and is graduating with a triple minor. She will be starting SFU's Professional Development Program in September 2021 and hopes to become a primary teacher in the future. Eleni also enjoys painting and baking in her free time.

I have worked with a specific school site for two years now. Therefore, there are quite a few students who I have been tutoring for a while. When working in person last year, I encountered a new Canadian primary student who absolutely adored being read to. She would pick out various library books and seek me out to read them to her. Even when we were doing different activities, she would often grab a book and ask me to read with her instead. Fast forward to this year, where we are tutoring online, her love for stories has not stopped. Each week she requests different e-books for us to read together, and loves following along by looking at the pictures.

A few months ago, I decided to go through a list of sight words with this student before our regular reading portion. She identified and read almost all of the words, and we were both quite excited about her progress. From then on, I have had her “help” me read. When I am reading a story, I use my cursor to have the student follow along. I then stop at any sight words that I encounter in the text and have her read them herself. She has expressed enjoyment with this process, and it has become clear that she has benefitted from it.

At a recent session before beginning our weekly reading, this student excitedly said to me; “Miss Eleni, I can read now!” I replied with “Wow, Ariana! I can’t wait to read with you!” When I heard these words come from her mouth I felt overjoyed. In fact, I even felt emotional. Not only has this student progressed in her literacy skills, but she also recognizes and feels confident in her own abilities. Watching this student's progress since arriving in Canada last year has been truly remarkable.

Whereas before she enjoyed being read to, she now is eager and expresses interest in reading by herself. While at first, I was unsure of how effective our virtual reading (using e-books) would be, it is evident that our efforts have truly benefited our students.

Through instances like this one, I have learned that consistency and persistence are key. Investing time into things that students are interested in will lead to extraordinary outcomes. Ultimately, successes like this one are a part of what makes tutoring extremely rewarding, both in-person and virtually.





Lost in Google Translation

Written By: Wassim Khelifi

Wassim Khelifi is completing his undergraduate degree in Computer Science and is passionate about using technology to make a positive difference on Earth. In his spare time, Wassim enjoys playing soccer and reading.

I flip open my laptop and enter the Zoom link into the web browser's URL. After the application icon dances a little bit at the bottom of my screen, the window opens, and I am greeted by my fellow tutors and the site coordinator. After a quick meeting, the Zoom waiting room is opened and squares containing the students' names (and sometimes their videos) start popping up on the right side of my screen. A 2021 Friends of Simon session has officially started!

The literacy activity and discussion go by very quickly and I now find myself in a breakout room with a student whom I have been working with for the past couple of weeks.

I open 2 windows on my computer.

On the left, I have the book we are reading for this week and on the right, I have Google Translate, set to translate from English to Arabic.

Since the student speaks and understands Arabic, any time there is a word that they do not understand in English, I enter the word in Google Translate and it returns the corresponding word in Arabic. I have made Google Translate a common occurrence during our reading sessions and it's always very rewarding when the student is able to read the word in Arabic and let me know that they understand.

We breeze through our book this week, making great use of our friend, Google Translate. I check the time at the top right of my screen and realize we still have 20 minutes left in our session. I ask the student if there was a certain type of book that they wanted to read.

"Animals", they declare.

"Do you have a favorite type of animal?" I ask.

I receive no reply.

"Is there an animal you want to read about?"

Again, I receive no reply.

I wonder what I could have possibly said that made the student no longer wish to participate in our session. With a whirlwind of thoughts in my head, I decide the best course of action is to wait and let the student think about what I had just asked.

The breakout room was silent. The student wasn't saying anything, and I reciprocated. Even though our session was virtual, you could have been able to hear a pin drop. Suddenly, the silence is broken by a familiar voice.

"Penguin", exclaims Google Translate, in its unique and robotic tone.





Roles Reversed

Written By: Chloe Ross

Chloe Ross is working towards her undergraduate degree in Environmental Science and has a great appreciation for nature. Chloe enjoys spending time outdoors and tending to her many houseplants in her spare time.

A new activity, a new platform. I open my PowerPoint lesson about idioms, something the triplets have shown they needed to work on in previous activities.

“Do any of you know what an idiom is?” I ask the boys. They all respond in the chat saying they had never heard that word before. I go on to explain how idioms are sayings that mean something different than what they seem, and that they can be fun to use.

“If I wanted to say it was raining a lot outside, I could instead say ‘It’s raining cats and dogs!’”, there is a pause and then one of them giggles. Instead of focusing on how they may need to memorize these sayings to be able to understand them, we turn them into funny stories. I share some more with them.

“If someone says, ‘don’t cut corners’, think of driving a car, and instead of turning around the corner you continue to drive straight”, I draw a picture to go along with my explanation. The boys think this one is funny too.

After we finish going through the idioms I prepared, one of the boys asks “Is ‘better to be an alive coward than a hero’ an idiom?”

I explain how yes this could be an idiom and asked where he had heard that one before. I ask if they had any idioms in their language they wanted to share with me. The Zoom chat fills as the triplets share idioms they know, and then they explain them to me. The roles in the lesson have reversed! I am ecstatic knowing that they truly understand the concept, evident as they were now teaching me about it.

As time begins to run out, I ask the boys "What idiom was your favourite?" and they all answer excitedly.

In the chat one of the triplets types "I am excited to use these with my friends :)"

I respond by saying that "I am excited to use the ones you all taught me too!"





Until the Very Last Second

Written By: Grace Han

Grace Han is in the third year of her undergraduate degree. She is pursuing minors in Curriculum and Instruction, Counselling and Human Development, and Early Learning. She hopes to become an elementary school teacher one day. In her spare time, Grace likes to play the drums, journal, and bake cookies.

In my breakout room, the students and I do not even notice how fast time is passing by as we are doing homework and literacy activities. Until we see a 'breakout room is closing in 60 seconds' notification, signaling that it is time to say goodbye.

After looking at the notification a student says "I do not want to leave! If I press the little red 'x', can I stay on Zoom with you?"

My heart flutters hearing this and I say, "I wish we could stay for longer, but do not worry, I will see you next week!" At this point, there were still 40 seconds left until our breakout room was closing.

"Can I stay online with you for the next 40 seconds then?" the student asks.

"Of course!" I say with a beaming smile, we counted down until the very last second, 3...2...1...

Despite the Zoom call being disconnected, my heart felt connected and warm just from those extra 40 seconds I spent with my student. Now with every online tutoring session, we make sure to stay online until the very last second.





Where It All Began

Written By: Satveer Ladhar

Satveer Ladhar has completed her undergraduate degree in Criminology with a minor in Business, as well as the Legal Studies certificate at SFU. She is passionate about human rights issues and sincerely values the impact of education. In her spare time, Satveer enjoys working out, spending time with loved ones, and visiting new places.

Joining Friends of Simon as a newly admitted SFU student, I had no idea where this opportunity would take me. I could have never predicted the laughs, the chaos and the amazing connections I would form with fellow tutees and with my students. I could have never predicted that I would be supporting my students through a pandemic.

When it was announced that Friends of Simon would be delivered remotely via Zoom it was as though all the years of experience I had were erased. I felt incredibly nervous and unsure about my abilities to be a great lead tutor, virtually. I was concerned that I would not be able to create the sense of community that Friends of Simon is famous for – relationship building is crucial to this work.

I found comfort in knowing that I would be returning to a site where I have spent most of my time as a tutor. Though this site has challenged me in almost every way, this is a place where I know I can make a difference.

From the start of the school year I worked closely with one of our English language learners. He was initially a very shy and reserved student who didn't feel comfortable sharing and participating in the sessions. At times the tutors were unsure if he was understanding a word we were saying as he would blankly stare into the screen of our Zoom sessions.

One day I had a breakthrough with this student. We were in a breakout room reading Dolch sight words, and out of nowhere, he started sharing more about himself. I was able to learn where his family was from, the Netflix shows he was currently watching and how many languages he spoke. The best part of the conversation was when he smiled at me and said “I like coming here”. While these four words may seem underwhelming, they were incredibly reassuring. Despite my nervousness in navigating this new online environment, I created an enjoyable space for at least one of my students. A place where his voice is heard and where he will always be supported.

Though my time with Friends of Simon will sadly come to an end this semester, I am overjoyed.

From my first shift as a shy new hire to a self-assured lead tutor, I am glad I had the opportunity to return to the site where it all began.





Where We All Start

Written By: Anonymous

I flip through another page of the book I have checked out for Aziza online. She is laying on her bed staring fixedly at the screen in front of her as the pictures in the book give life and meaning to the words on the page. We read about festivals and hayrides and apple orchards, and she laughs at my poor attempt at acting as I make faces and silly voices to enliven our little reading session.

This is my second semester at Aziza's site, and I know she has always been a very shy and quiet student in our big group activities, so it is nice to see her be a little more relaxed now that we are in our breakout rooms.

I flip through another page, and to the other one after that. I smile as I watch her through my screen. She has herself on mute, but I can see her mouthing the words and reading along with me. It is a simple picture book, but she is completely enraptured in the plot. I am used to her not speaking much during this time as I know she struggles with her confidence in reading and prefers to listen to my words instead.

As we near the end of our session, my words are cut short as I see her arm shoot up. "Do you have a question about the story, Aziza?" I ask gently. I see a bit of uncertainty on her face as she shakes her head. I wait patiently for her to answer as I notice her eyes quickly scanning over the page on her screen. She finally unmutes herself and asks me: "May I please read the next page?". "Of course!", I answer. She confidently reads through the rest of the story herself and I watch as she loses herself in her task. "You're doing great, Aziza," I say.

She beams at me as she finishes reading through the last few pages. "I really liked that book," Aziza says as we get ready to head back to the main room; "Can I also read the next one next week?" she asks me hopefully. "I would certainly love it if you did", I happily answer.





Zoom for Improvement

Written By: Anonymous

As the youngest and most timid of the students, Reema has had the most difficulty adjusting to online tutoring. Lacking a lot of the same technological know-how that the other students have, she has struggled a lot with most basic Zoom functions since the beginning of the school year. Despite her best efforts while we guided her through the steps and even showed her what to click, she could not figure out how to annotate the screen or use the chat. That was okay though, we easily found ways around those issues like playing fewer games that required the students to all annotate or having her describe aloud the words she had come up with in games like Boggle. One time, we even ended up moving everyone else into a breakout room so that Reema could take her turn just like everyone else did when she could not manage to enter a breakout room.

And though we did sometimes try and explain how to use certain functions when she was determined to use them, we generally planned around her technological difficulties. It had been this way for months and we were all used to it by then. So, imagine our surprise in the last weeks when, with very little guidance, Reema was able to move easily in and out of breakout rooms! Not only that, she has now figured out how to use the raise hand function in Zoom and even use the reactions, once using the crying laughing emoji when one of the other students said something particularly funny. Now, she can play around with the annotation function, even sometimes when she isn't supposed to, which doesn't bother us too much as we are much more excited that she has figured out how to use Zoom all by herself! Watching Reema grow out of her shell and become more comfortable with Zoom over the past few months has been a treasure and we are all very proud of her!





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