

Claudine James

C James - MMB Teacher Award

Committee Appointments & Leadership Roles	Awards & Honors	Speaking Engagements
2024–2025: National Humanities Center Teacher Advisory Council	2025 – Distinguished Alumni “H Award,” Henderson State University	August 21, 2025 – Featured Speaker, Harmony Academy at National University Conference, Tucson, Arizona (Bridging the Science of Reading & Relationships)
2024–Present: Harmony (National University) Teacher Educator Group	2025 – King Kennedy Educator of the Year Award, Arkansas Black Democratic Caucus	July 8, 2025 – Featured Speaker, Harmony Academy & Mrs Wordsmith Virtual Convening (Bridging the Science of Reading & Relationships)
2022–Present: Reading Reimagined Teacher Advisory Council	2024 – YouTube Silver Creator Award (100,000+ subscribers)	June 2025 – Selected Main Stage Speaker, ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) Conference, San Antonio, Texas
2020–2021: National Constitution Center Teacher Advisory Council	2024 – Bessie B. Moore Arkansas Economics Teacher of the Year	March 24, 2025 – Guest Speaker, Theresa Hoover Memorial United Methodist Church, Women’s History Month Program (Women Moving Forward Together: Education)
2020–2022: WE Schools Ambassador Council	2023 – Grammar Educator of the Year (Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar)	March 15, 2025 – Keynote Speaker, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Chi Nu Omega Chapter “I’m Every Woman: Embracing the Woman Within” Luncheon
2020–2023: BOOST Ambassador	2023 – ADCOLOR Influencer of the Year	2024 – Selected Main Stage Speaker, ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) Conference, Denver, Colorado
2020–2022: Arkansas 2020 Census Complete Counts Committee	2023 – OSTI (Out-of-School Time Innovation) Award for Excellence in Leadership, BOOST Conference	June 19, 2024 – Speaker, Juneteenth Celebration, Arkansas State University Three Rivers (Our Poetic Journey, presentation and poetry program)
2020–2022: VP & Board Member, Malvern Tuggle Restoration Committee (Restore Historic Rosenwald School)	2022 – Finalist, ADCOLOR Influencer of the Year	June 19, 2023 – Speaker, Juneteenth Celebration, Arkansas State University Three Rivers (provided historical background on Juneteenth)
2019–2020: Statistics in Schools (SIS) Ambassador, U.S. Census Bureau	2022 – NCTE Middle School Educator of the Year, First Runner-Up	2023 – Master Class Presenter, BOOST Conference (Establishing Positive Connections with Your Students)
2018–2021: Hot Spring County Conversations Executive Committee (county strategic planning organization)	2021 – Osmo for Schools Teacher Appreciation Award (1 of 4 teachers recognized nationwide)	2023 – Keynote Speaker, Arkansas Association of Alternative Educators (AAAE) Annual Conference, Little Rock, Arkansas
2017–2019: State of Arkansas Teacher Leadership Advisory Group	2021 – Arkansas ESL Educator of the Year	2022 – Keynote Speaker, Missouri–Arkansas Kiwanis Education Meeting, hosted by ASUTR
2016–Present: Malvern MLK Committee, Student Engagement Director	2021 – LifeChanger of the Year Award	2022 – Keynote Speaker, Arkansas Association of Instructional Media Annual Conference (Evolve as an Educator)

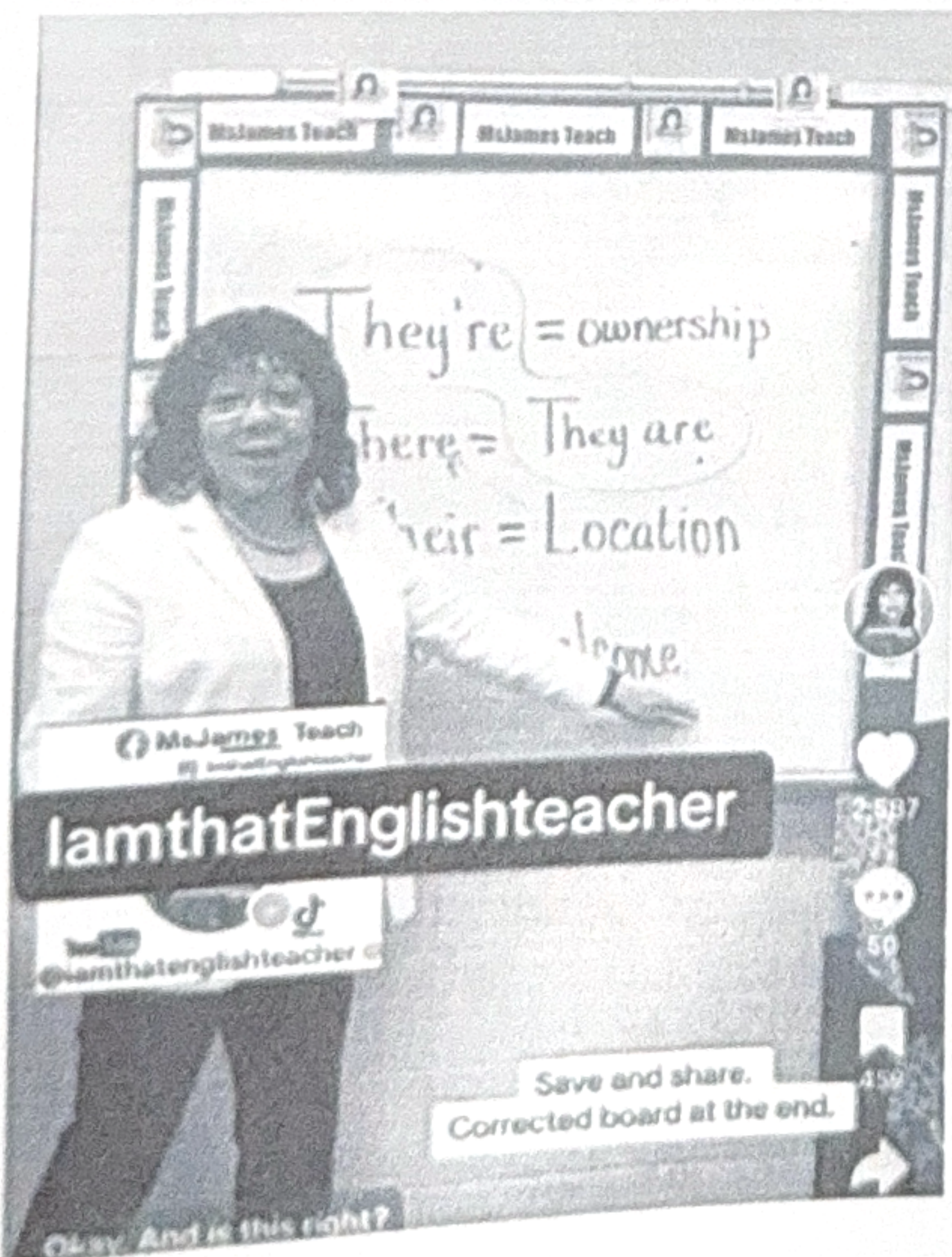
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2014–2020: Arkansas Humanities Council Board Member (+2 subcommittees)	2020 – Honored Teacher Award (nominated by student Audrey Carr)	2016 – Commencement Speaker, College of the Ouachitas
	2020 – We Teachers Award (sponsored by Walgreens)	
	2020 – James T. Atkinson Arkansas History Teacher of the Year	
	2020 – New York Times Teaching Project Fellow	
	2019 – Henry Ford Innovative Teacher Award (Innovative Nation)	
	2019 – MLK Parade Grand Marshal	
	2018 – Hot Spring County Community Service Award	
	2018 – National University Harmony Teacher Award	
	2018 – Penguin Random House Publishers Literacy Award (NCTE)	
	2017 – Malvern School District Teacher of the Year	
	2016 – Hot Spring County Educator of the Year	
	2016 – Commencement Speaker, College of the Ouachitas	

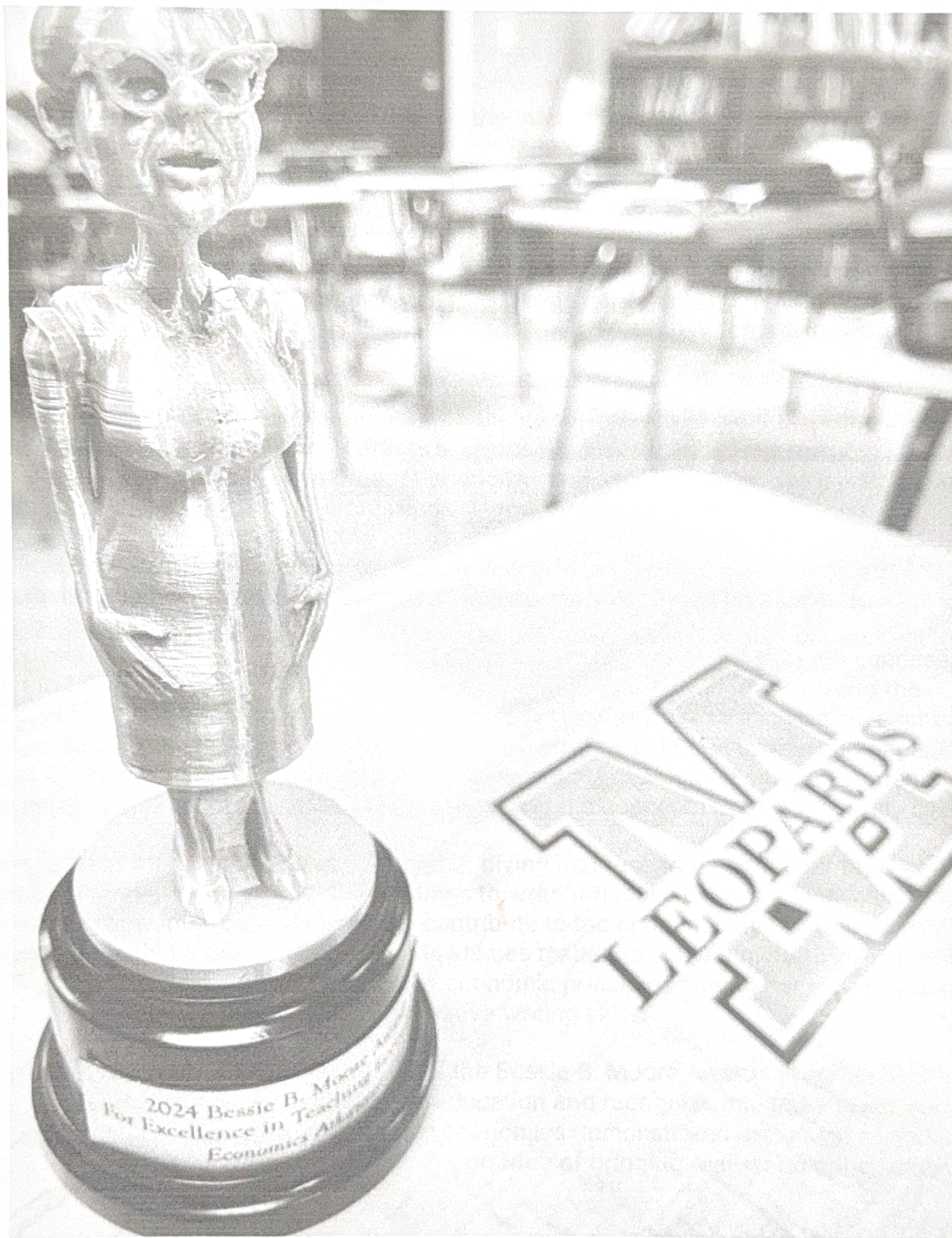
CLAUDINE JAMES

Inspired by her aunts to pursue a career in education, **Claudine James** is a National Board Certified teacher whose 16-year career is marked by a deep passion for empowering students and a commitment to educational innovation. In her role as a middle school English educator, she has inspired countless students with her engaging and inclusive teaching style, making complex concepts accessible and engaging.

James has gained international recognition as a social media influencer, with over 5.8 million TikTok followers and over 300,000 YouTube subscribers. She bridges the gap between traditional education and modern technology by sharing grammar lessons, writing tips, and vocabulary insights on social media. Students, educators, and lifelong learners alike trust her for her ability to connect with diverse audiences.



She has received numerous accolades for her teaching excellence, including the Henry Ford Innovative Teacher Award (2019) and the Economics Teacher of the Year (2024). In addition to her classroom and online work, she has presented at leading educational conferences throughout her state, sharing innovative strategies for engaging students.



Malvern Middle School Teacher Wins Bessie B. Moore Award for Innovative Cross-Curricular Project

Claudine James, Malvern Middle School ELA teacher, was recently honored with the prestigious 2023-2024 Bessie B. Moore Award for Excellence in Teaching Economics.

The award, which recognizes Arkansas teachers who develop outstanding economic and personal finance projects, celebrates Ms. James's creative approach to integrating economics into her curriculum. Her innovative project, "Family Careers and the Economy: Integration of Economics With Creative Writing," was implemented through her creative writing classes, demonstrating the interconnectedness of economics and personal experiences.

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The award is named in honor of Bessie B. Moore, a pioneering advocate for economic education in Arkansas. Known for her commitment to promoting economic literacy, Moore dedicated her life to ensuring students received a comprehensive understanding of economics. The award program seeks to continue her legacy by recognizing teachers who go "above and beyond" in economic education, encouraging creativity, innovation, and the integration of economics into classroom lessons.

Ms. James's project provided students with the opportunity to explore the economic impact of their family members' careers and jobs. By investigating how these occupations contributed to the broader economy, students gained valuable insights into the ripple effects of individual professions. Through research, writing, and analysis, they developed a deeper understanding of key economic concepts and their real-world applications. This approach allowed them to make personal connections to the economy, enhancing both their economic literacy and creative writing skills.

Her passion for cross-curricular learning played a crucial role in the project's success. Over the past five years, she attended the Economics Arkansas workshops and the REAL Econ for All Teacher Summer Institutes, despite not being an economics teacher. She loved the content and was eager to bring it into her classroom in new and engaging ways. By incorporating economics into creative writing, Ms. James enabled students to see beyond traditional economic lessons, applying the concepts to their everyday lives.

The students took ownership of the project, diving into research about their family members' careers. They used their findings to write reflective essays, creatively presenting how individual occupations contribute to the economy. By framing economics within a personal context, Ms. James made the subject matter relevant and accessible, sparking a deeper interest in economic principles among her students and invoking them to use their developed creative writing skills.

Ms. James's project met all the criteria of the Bessie B. Moore Awards Program, which aims to stimulate creativity in economic education and recognize outstanding educators. Her unique blend of creative writing and economics demonstrated the power of cross-curricular teaching and highlighted the importance of bringing real-world applications into the classroom.

Winning this award was a proud moment for Ms. James and her students. The "Bessie Brigade" visited her classroom to present the award, which included a monetary prize, a basket of goodies, and "The Bessie" trophy. This recognition celebrated Ms. James's innovative teaching methods and her dedication to fostering a deeper understanding of economics in her students through creative and impactful lessons.



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Social Media's Favorite English Teacher

'Taking the time to be engaging' and setting high expectations are key to good teaching, says TikTok influencer and middle school teacher Claudine James.

By Paige Tutt

June 14, 2024

Claudine James, an Arkansas middle school teacher, has 5.7 million TikTok followers.

It's an unexpected turn of events. "I never saw this coming. I never wished for this," says James. "All I ever wanted to do was be a good teacher, and I always have that in the back of my mind."

It all started with the goal of shoring up her students' grammar, punctuation, spelling, and writing skills during the pandemic. She began posting short supplemental video lessons on YouTube, linked to class writing assignments. But her videos didn't get many views, and her students kept making the same mistakes.



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Courtesy of Claudine James, pictured.

A few students suggested posting her videos to TikTok. "Kids will see them because they'll already be on TikTok," they told her. She had never heard of the platform but posted her first video in December 2020. In less than a week, her account @iamthatenglishteacher had nearly 10,000 followers. Comments came flooding in: Please explain how to properly use the word "myself." Is "texted" the past tense of "text," or can you simply say "text"? Could you do "whose" vs. "who's"?

A self-described overachiever who will do "whatever is necessary to get my students to learn English," James just completed her 15th year as an English teacher at the same Arkansas middle school she attended as a student. She's become a sought-after presenter at education and technology conferences, winning numerous awards, including LifeChanger of the Year and most recently the 2023 Adcolor Influencer award.

I spoke with James about how she nurtures engagement, robust relationships, and academic success in her classroom—and online with the millions of students and English learners who consume her content.

Paige Tutt: What core principles guide your work as an English teacher?

Claudine James: I remember as a struggling college student, I was upset that we bought this book called *Middle School Classroom Management* for \$65 and only opened it one time. My professor could have just skipped that because he wrote on the board, "Set high expectations."

I can't remember anything else, but I remember those words. I use those words to guide me.

You set all those expectations the first day of school. Don't wait until the middle of the year and try to rein your students back in.

Tutt: How do you encourage kids to meet, or even exceed, high expectations? **James MMB Teacher Award**

James: I could write a one-page essay on all of my students by the end of the first semester. I know that much about them, and I know what their potential is and how to motivate them. So when people ask, "How'd you get them to do this?" that's what you have to do. You can't see a student come into your classroom and not pay attention to them, to their wants and needs.

I have to show each student on their level why what I'm trying to get them to learn and understand is valuable.

Tutt: In your videos, we can hear your students responding to your questions, and they sound very comfortable. They'll confidently volunteer answers to your questions, even incorrect answers, and everyone seems fine. How do you foster that sort of supportive classroom environment?

James: When I asked my students, "Do y'all feel safe?" they said they don't feel bad when they guess a wrong answer because I don't make them feel bad. I keep probing to get the right answer. I think that's key to being a successful teacher and to having an engaging classroom.

I also set an example of respect. I respect my students, and I in turn expect them to respect me. People ask, "How do you get your kids to say, 'No, ma'am' and 'Yes, ma'am'?" I explain that I'm a teacher and I deserve respect; in return, I'm going to respect you. When someone says, "Ms. James?" I respond, "Yes, ma'am?"

Tutt: When the camera's off, you must have to navigate some level of disengagement in your classroom?

James: I try to create a space for all of them to fit in. I had one student who had a lot of energy. He became my helper: "You have to finish this work, and then I'll let you collect the books." So I found a niche for him. Equity is not doing the same thing for all students, because all students don't come to the table with the same resources.



I have to show each student on their level why what I'm trying to get them to learn and understand is valuable.

— CLAUDINE JAMES

Whether they're an ESL [English as a second language] student, a student with an academic improvement plan, or a student who is already academically successful, I have to reach each one of those students.

I have seen seasoned educators make this mistake—creating a “Betty Crocker” classroom. Everyone’s the same, everyone’s treated the same. If this assignment is due today, no matter who you are or what’s going on, it’s due today. But students just aren’t the same.

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Tutt: I imagine that’s difficult when you have a hundred students to differentiate for. So many kids with so many different needs.

James: It is. I had 108 students this year. I’ve had as many as 128. And don’t get me wrong, not every student is appreciative of the gift of a passionate teacher. But I have a higher calling than just one student. That one student that isn’t appreciative, I’m so sorry, but I’m not going to turn off the faucet and stop showering everyone else with as much knowledge, inspiration, and motivation as I can. So it is hard sometimes—but oh gosh, girl, I love what I do.

Tutt: Why do you think your TikTok grammar lessons have become so popular?

James: If you are an American student, some of the things that I teach on TikTok aren’t taught. You are expected to know those things. For example, you don’t say, “I seen you.” You say, “I have seen you.” I made a lesson that talked about how you have to use the word *have* or *has* before *seen*. *Seen* cannot be used alone. People were commenting, “Wait a minute, it can’t?”

I do always tell my students that this is not always the way I talk at home. I have a home language, but this is the language that we speak through pencil and paper at school. This is our official communication language in education and business.

Tutt: From your perspective, what’s missing in how we teach ELA [English language arts] in schools today?

James: Taking the time to be engaging. And you have to read the literature that you’re trying to sell.

When I was in middle school, I was an Avon salesman. I was too young to sign up, so it was in my mom’s name. By age 16, I was the No. 1 Avon salesman in the county—well, my mom was. I actually used all the Avon products and could say, “This works.” It’s the same thing with getting someone to read a book.

A teacher said to me, “I’m having problems with the kids not reading the book. Why are your kids loving it?” I said, “Have you read the book yet?” She said, “I’m reading it with the students.” Well that’s probably the problem. If you haven’t used a product, you’re not going to be a very good salesman. So, I bolster the love of reading by being engaged in reading myself. You foster that engagement by being an active participant *before* they read so that you can sell them on the book.

Tutt: Engagement is a big priority for you as a teacher—how does that help make learning stick?

James: Find out how you can hold a student’s interest and how you can connect to them where they are. I think that’s part of leadership—actually knowing how to get people to respond.

The other day I was standing by the thermostat and I asked, "How do you spell thermostat? It's like, T-H-E-R-M... therm? Why do they call it a thermostat?"

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Then I said, "I know, *therm-* means 'heat.'" A couple students said, "Oh, yeah." I asked, "What other words start with *therm-* that mean 'heat'?" Someone said *thermodynamics*, and another said *thermograph*. We were studying root words, but they didn't know that.

So finding those starting points where you can teach traditional things to students in a nontraditional way, in a way that they won't forget—that's taking the time to be engaging.

This interview has been edited for brevity, clarity, and flow.