



Popular

Latest

Newsletters

The Atlantic

Saved stories

My Account

Give a Gift

TECHNOLOGY

I'm a High Schooler. AI Is Demolishing My Education.

The end of critical thinking in the classroom

By Ashanty Rosario

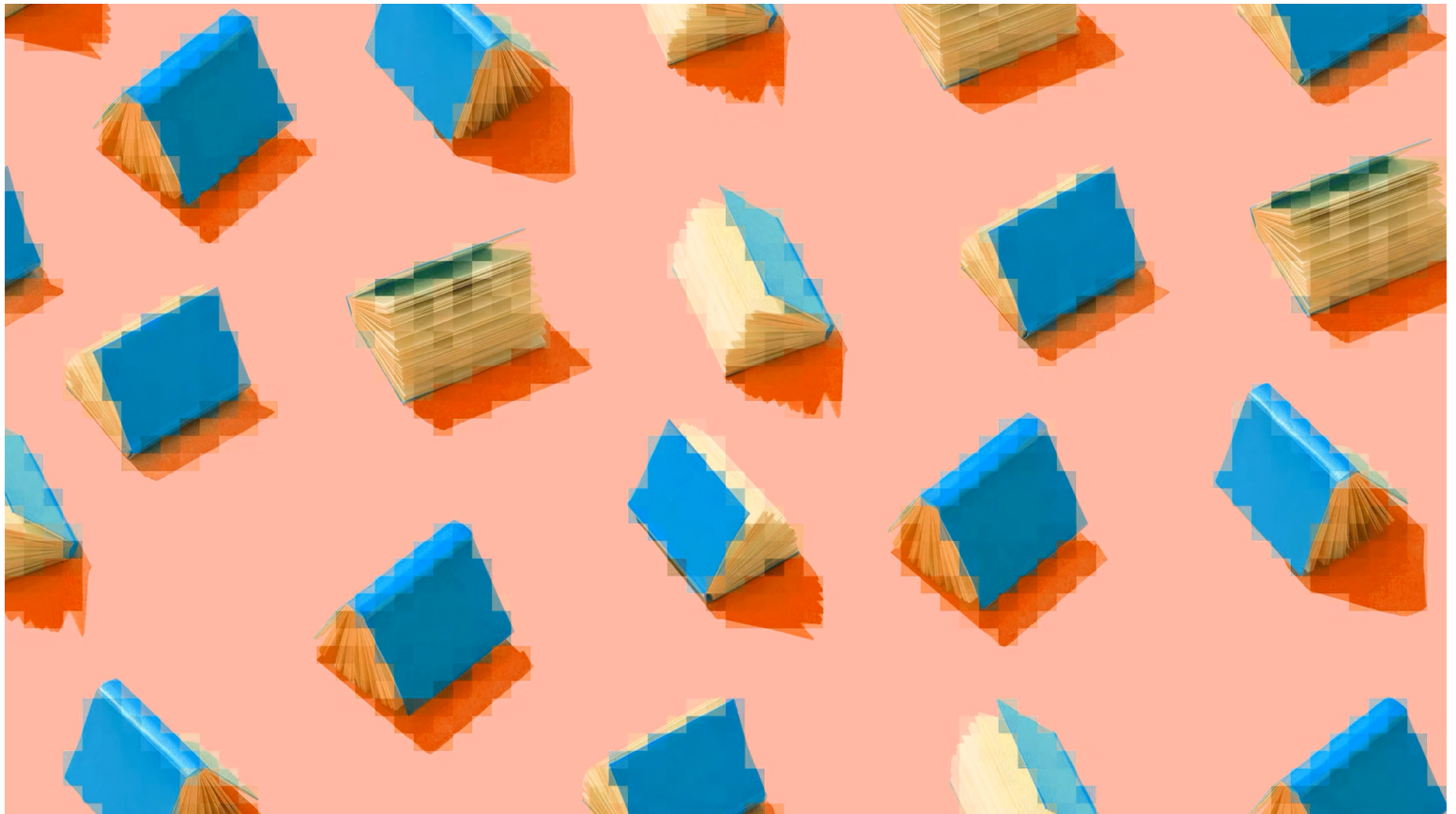


Illustration by Akshita Chandra / The Atlantic. Source: Getty.

SEPTEMBER 3, 2025

SHARE AS GIFT SAVE 

AI has transformed my experience of education. I am a senior at a public high school in New York, and these tools are everywhere. I do not want to use them in the way I see other kids my age using them—I generally choose not to—but they are inescapable.

During a lesson on the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, I watched a classmate discreetly shift in their seat, prop their laptop up on a crossed leg, and highlight the entirety of the chapter under discussion. In seconds, they had pulled up ChatGPT and dropped the text into the prompt box, which spat out an AI-generated annotation of the chapter. These annotations are used for discussions; we turn them in to our teacher at the end of class, and many of them are graded as part of our class participation. What was meant to be a reflective, thought-provoking discussion on slavery and human resilience was flattened into copy-paste commentary. In Algebra II, after homework worksheets were passed around, I witnessed a peer use their phone to take a quick snapshot, which they then uploaded to ChatGPT. The AI quickly painted my classmate's screen with what it asserted to be a step-by-step solution and relevant graphs.

These incidents were jarring—not just because of the cheating, but because they made me realize how normalized these shortcuts have become. Many homework assignments are due by 11:59 p.m., to be submitted online via

Google Classroom. We used to share memes about pounding away at the keyboard at 11:57, anxiously rushing to complete our work on time. These moments were not fun, exactly, but they did draw students together in a shared academic experience. Many of us were propelled by a kind of frantic productivity as we approached midnight, putting the finishing touches on our ideas and work. Now the deadline has been sapped of all meaning. AI has softened the consequences of procrastination and led many students to avoid doing any work at all. As a result, these programs have destroyed much of what tied us together as students. There is little intensity anymore. Relatively few students seem to feel that the work is urgent or that they need to sharpen their own mind. We are struggling to receive the lessons of discipline that used to come from having to complete complicated work on a tight deadline, because chatbots promise to complete our tasks in seconds.

Read: The AI takeover of education is just getting started

Desperate to address AI, schools across the U.S. are investing in detection tools and screen-monitoring software to curb cheating. Some of these tools have been used in my school: Teachers rely on plagiarism checkers and exam-proctoring software. Still, these systems aren't foolproof, and many students have begun to bypass these measures. Students use AI "humanizer" tools, which rephrase text to remove "robotic undertones," as one such program puts it, or they manually edit the AI's output themselves to simplify language or adjust the chatbot's sentence structure. During in-class exams, screens may be locked or recording technology may be employed, but students have ways around these, too—sneaking phones in, for example. Based on what I've

observed, preventative measures can only go so far.

The trouble with chatbots is not just that they allow students to get away with cheating or that they remove a sense of urgency from academics. The technology has also led students to focus on external results at the expense of internal growth. The dominant worldview seems to be: *Why worry about actually learning anything when you can get an A for outsourcing your thinking to a machine?*

During my sophomore year, I participated in my school's debate team. I was excited to have a space outside the classroom where creativity, critical thinking, and intellectual rigor were valued and sharpened. I love the rush of building arguments from scratch. ChatGPT was released back in 2022, when I was a freshman, but the debate team weathered that first year without being overly influenced by the technology—at least as far as I could tell. But soon, AI took hold there as well. Many students avoided the technology and still stand against it, but it was impossible to ignore what we saw at competitions: chatbots being used for research and to construct arguments between rounds.

To me, debate is about forming your own arguments and pushing yourself to refute curveball counters. It's about developing the skills to outthink and out-argue your opponent. It isn't about who can present the best cookie-cutter AI arguments with polished and possibly invented data. Something I once loved now feels empty.

[Read: College students have already changed forever](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2025/09/high-school-student-ai-education/684088/)

AI is not all bad. Some students may use these tools to develop their understanding or explore topics more deeply, serving their intellectual curiosity without actually cheating. AI can also be used as a study aid—say, quizzing you on vocabulary ahead of a Spanish test. But the temptation to abuse these tools is always there. I am concerned about what will happen as the short-term solutions presented by chatbots become the only ones that people know how to pursue—especially beyond the classroom. If we keep leaning on AI to sidestep pressure or deadlines, what happens when the tools aren't there? In the real world, chatbots cannot hold the powerful to account in the way an investigative reporter does, through relentless interviews and vetting hard-to-find information. They cannot perform open-heart surgery or ballet. Many of us are so accustomed to outsourcing that we're dulling the very instincts that we need to prevail in life: grit, critical thinking, and the ability to function smoothly under stress.

It will take more than AI detectors and screen monitoring to address this disconnect. Student assessments should be focused on tasks that are not easily delegated to technology: oral exams, for instance, in which students walk educators through their thinking process, or personalized writing assignments that are unique to the student or current events. Portfolio-based or presentational grading could be emphasized over traditional exams or pop quizzes, giving students ample time to earn their grades. Students can also be encouraged to reflect on their own work—using learning journals or discussion to express their struggles, approaches, and lessons learned after each assignment.

These strategies could create an academic environment where integrity, creativity, and original thought thrive. Whatever the path forward, it must be forged soon. If chatbots have made school easier to get through, they are also making school equally as hard to grow out of. The technology is producing a generation of eternal novices, unable to think or perform for themselves.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashanty Rosario

Ashanty Rosario is a senior at Newtown High School in Queens, New York.

Explore More Topics

ChatGPT, Frederick Douglass, New York City

**MOST
POPULAR**

**MORE FROM ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE**

[See All](#)

Fifty Years After History's Most Brutal Boxing Match VANN R. NEWKIRK II	Kayla Bartkowski / G... Grok's Responses Are Only Getting More Bizarre Elon Musk's chatbot is a slow- motion train wreck. MATTEO WONG	Illustration by The ... AI Is Grown, Not Built Nobody knows exactly what an AI will become. That's very bad. ELIEZER YUDKOWSKY AND NATE SOARES	Illustration by Ben ... The Question All Colleges Should Ask Themselves About AI How far are they willing to go to limit its harms? TYLER AUSTIN HARPER
How Originalism Killed the Constitution JILL LEPORE			
What Charlie Kirk Told Me About His Legacy ISAAC STANLEY- BECKER	Illustration by Matt... Search Millions of YouTube Videos Used to Train Generative AI Inside the data sets training new video- creating tools ALEX REISNER	Illustration by Matt... AI Is Coming for YouTube Creators At least 15 million videos have been snatched by tech companies. ALEX REISNER	Illustration by Aksh... I'm a High Schooler. AI Is Demolishing My Education. The end of critical thinking in the classroom ASHANTY ROSARIO

Robert Redford Was as Real as It Gets

K. AUSTIN COLLINS

The New War on Weed

NICHOLAS FLORKO

The Irony of Using Charlie Kirk's Murder to Silence Debate

DAVID A. GRAHAM

Understanding Zionism

ARASH AZIZI

Grok's Responses Are Only Getting More Bizarre

MATTEO WONG

Six Ways to Start Early and Lift Your Mood

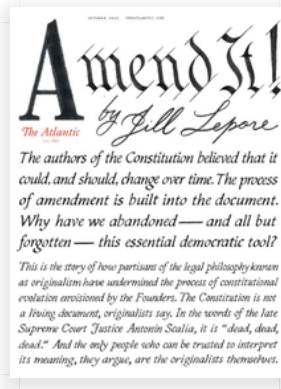
ARTHUR C. BROOKS

The Atlantic Daily

Get our guide to the day's biggest news and ideas, delivered to your inbox every weekday and Sunday mornings. [See more newsletters](#)

Sign Up

Your newsletter subscriptions are subject to [The Atlantic's Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms and Conditions](#).



Ideas That Matter

Subscribe and support more than 160 years of independent journalism.

Subscribe

About

Our History

Careers

Contact

Help Center

Contact Us

Atlantic Brand Partners

Press

Reprints & Permissions

Podcasts

Radio Atlantic

Good on Paper

The David Frum Show

How to Age Up

Autocracy in America

Subscription

Purchase

Give a Gift

Manage Subscription

Group Subscriptions

Atlantic Editions

Newsletters

FOLLOW













Privacy Policy | Your Privacy Choices  | Advertising Guidelines | Terms & Conditions

Terms of Sale | Responsible Disclosure | Site Map

TheAtlantic.com © 2025 The Atlantic Monthly Group. All Rights Reserved.

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google Privacy Policy and Terms of Service apply

The Atlantic