

fridays @SLOCA

Teacher Bios

GET TO KNOW YOUR
FRIDAYS @SLOCA TEACHERS!



ALEX FUNGE: PRI/INT *Common Arts Exploration (Tailoring, Navigation, Architecture)*

Alex Funge is never out of his depth—at least, not in the water. The Lodi, CA native discovered a love of learning while coaching children’s swimming lessons during high school. This passion for education soon expanded to other subjects like reading and math, leading him to earn a B.S. in Liberal Studies from Cal Poly. Alex taught sixth grade in Stockton and fifth grade in Templeton before starting at SLOCA in 2023. Having worked in public education, he appreciates SLOCA’s focus on nurturing the whole student, not just academics. He values how classical education contextualizes each student’s experience within the broader sweep of history, encouraging reflection on past and present. Outside the classroom, Alex enjoys painting, bouldering, and hopes to one day sew his own outfits.



AMANDA THAYER: PRI/INT *Theatre*

Amanda Thayer is a local youth theatre director. She has been a SLOCA mom for 3 years and loves the SLOCA community. Amanda specializes in adapting classical literature into melodramatic plays for kids. Fun facts, Amanda is one of our Librarians at SLOCA. She loves to take care of Homer, our school Tortoise. If Amanda isn’t helping your students find the right book for their next adventure, she will have her nose in her own book. You can also find Amanda starring in local productions around the Central Coast. She appreciates the opportunity to work with these students!



ANNA ROCHA: PRI/INT *Medieval Makerspace: Catapults, Constellations, & Concoctions*

Anna Rocha has always loved learning. The Frazier Park, CA native was raised by a mother who encouraged curiosity and intellectual exploration from a young age. At CSU Bakersfield, Anna earned her B.A. in Philosophy. She worked as an elementary school librarian before joining the SLOCA staff in 2022. So what about our culture made Anna want to work here? Our love of books, of course! For her, the school’s emphasis on reading quality texts impressed her immediately. In addition to reading, Anna loves walking with her family, enjoying good food, and singing to herself far too often. Her goals at the moment—improving her skills in Spanish and piano.



BEN VATTANONTA: LMS/UMS *SLOCA Motion*

Ben Vattanonta grew up in Los Angeles, surrounded by a hard-working and inspiring family. His grandmother ran an elementary school in Thailand, so education has always been central to his life. After earning a B.S. in Business Administration from CSU Northridge, Ben worked with a tutoring service for over 15 years. He then taught sixth grade at St. Mary’s Catholic School in Santa Maria for 3 years before joining the SLOCA team in 2025. Here, he’s inspired by the school’s mission, the professionalism of its community, and the power of classical education to help students discover their full potential as human beings. Outside the classroom, he enjoys hiking, weight training, boxing, and reading on the beach. His dream for the future? Learning how to read and write the Thai language.



CELESTE PUCHETA: PRI/INT *Spanish*

Celeste Pucheta knew SLOCA was right for her from the get-go. Growing up in Santa Maria, she volunteered with youth programs during high school. The experience pushed her to pursue higher education at Cal Poly, where she earned a B.S. in Psychology. Before joining the SLOCA team in 2024, Celeste worked with sixth graders at Pacheco Elementary in San Luis Obispo, focusing on math support. For her, what makes SLOCA special is the care and love everyone puts into making this school a warm and inviting environment. When she's not in the classroom, Celeste can be found either hanging out with her two cats or in the kitchen baking some sweets.



DEENA ESCHENBACK: PRI/INT/LMS/UMS *Bouldering Bears*

Deena Eschenback works with our kindergarteners and our Friday Team and considers SLOCA an incredible community that holds fast to exceptional ideals. The idea that all people should be continually learning and growing has been an aspect of classical education that she has consistently admired. When she first started homeschooling 22 years ago, her love of learning was ignited and the world never looked the same. Originally from Los Angeles, Deena went to Cuesta and De Anza College. When she's not on campus, she's probably puttering around in the kitchen, playing baseball with Finn, or traveling to visit her big kids. She'd also really like to learn an instrument, specifically the piano!



EMILY DERBISH: TEACHER'S AIDE *Theatre*

A California girl through and through, Emily Derbish grew up not far from the Central Coast in Ventura. She stayed in Southern California for her higher education, earning a B.A. in Psychology with a minor in Business Administration from the University of Redlands, followed by a master's degree in Teaching and Learning from USC Rossier School of Education. She taught middle school humanities and enrichment classes at Alliance Valera Middle Academy in Los Angeles for 7 years before joining SLOCA in 2024. Emily was immediately drawn to the school's nurturing and supportive atmosphere, which prepares students to be lifelong learners. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, trying delicious food, hiking with her husband, and spending time with her Spaniel/Collie pup, Adam.



JAKE SCHOONMAKER: LMS/UMS *Interactive Hands-On Science*

Jake Schoonmaker is an incoming LMS Classroom Aide at SLOCA for the 2026-2027 school year. He grew up all around the country, but spent a considerable amount of time on the Central Coast throughout his adolescence. Jake attended Cal Poly where he studied Earth Science and founded a local business in the music industry. As his career in music gained some traction he took a hiatus from school to pursue that full time. In the slow season for the industry he would put some of his science background to good use and spent a great deal of time as a pastry chef for some wonderful local restaurants. He eventually turned to academics and earned his AA in History from Cuesta College, then his BA in Liberal Studies (K-12 Education) from Chico State, and is currently in an MA Literacy Education program that is set to wrap up in spring of 2027. Jake has a deep passion for education, communication, and literacy in the modern world. He looks forward to being a member of the SLOCA community and meeting you all in due time!

**KAIDEN TOLKAMP: LMS/UMS** *Outdoor Nature & Common Arts Skill Building Survival*

A love for the mountains, the ocean, and a hunger for good food brought Kaiden Tolcamp to California in 2017 to study at Biola University, where he graduated with a degree in English writing. Through the Torrey Honors College, Kaiden took the first step in his journey of studying great books in great conversation with great people. Before joining the SLOCA team in 2025, Kaiden used his writing and creative skills as a marketing manager while also developing his teaching skills part-time in Sunday school. A deep desire for relational work and a heart for students led him to teach full-time. Kaiden knew he wanted to be a part of the SLOCA community because of its focus on virtuous living and its incorporation of family in children's education.

**KATHERINE WORHUNSKY: PRI/INT** *Lego & California History Pt. 2*

Katherine's love of learning began in the hills of Happy Valley, Santa Cruz, where she attended a Waldorf-inspired school that treated nature, art, and storytelling as the foundations of education—a philosophy her mother lived out daily as an educator herself. That early spark never faded. Katherine went on to earn her B.A. from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and her Multiple Subject Teaching Credential from Fresno State, building her career across lead, intervention, and Title 1 classrooms. She joined the SLOCA team drawn by its classical curriculum and the rare kind of school community where both teachers and students are genuinely inspired. At home in Edna Valley, Katherine and her husband Peter are kept wonderfully busy by their three children—Emery, Evan, and Eloise. Outside the classroom, she can be found planning the family's next big adventure, exploring Europe, cheering her kids on, and fostering neonatal kittens for the San Luis Obispo County Animal Shelter.

**KATIE HARDIN: KINDERGARTEN** *Kindergarten Play Labs*

Katherine (Katie) Hardin learned how to teach from the best—her parents. A Southern California native, she grew up watching them teach Kindergarten and loved seeing the joy of learning in their students. That early inspiration led her to earn a B.A. in Liberal Studies from CSU San Bernardino and a master's degree in Primary Teaching from Griffith University in Australia. Katie taught Kindergarten in Australia before returning to California and joining the SLOCA team in 2025. She is thrilled to be part of a community that fosters a genuine love of learning. Outside of school, Katie enjoys Pilates and yoga.

**KEARA MCCALL: TEACHER'S AIDE** *Theatre*

It's no mystery why Keara McCall works in education. Since childhood, the Atascadero native has been inspired by teachers and their ability to foster curiosity in others. This passion for learning led her to earn a B.S. in Psychological and Brain Sciences from UCSB. Growing up in the area, she heard about SLOCA from friends who attended and was intrigued by its distinctive teaching methods. When a position opened, she jumped at the opportunity. For Keara, what makes SLOCA unique is its use of the Trivium and how this methodology empowers students to build their own ideas and develop original questions. Outside the classroom, she enjoys reading at local coffee shops and hiking through nature.

**MICHELE STEVENS: LMS/UMS Theatre**

Michele Stevens was born in Washington D.C. and moved to San Diego at age 2, then again to Denver at age 15. She has a B.F.A in Acting; Masters of Organizational Leadership, a B.F.A. from Stephens College in Columbia, and an MO.; MOL from Biola University. She was the Artistic Director & Producer at Biola Youth Theatre, an after school program for youth ages 6-18, and was the full time choreographer for 15 years until the program was cut due to the fiscal impact of the pandemic on the University. She made her way to SLOCA in July of 2021, where she became the Den Bookstore Manager. She was impressed by the mission and aspirational values of the organization and believes strongly in the importance of a classical education. She has always wanted to work in a bookstore (if she couldn't do theatre) and she likes campus settings. Find her reading on her patio or at Avila Beach, going to Concerts in the Plaza, walking Montana de Oro, attending live theatre, or going swing dancing at the Madonna Inn. She has always been a voracious reader of literature and fiction, and that passion opened up windows to worlds she really wanted to explore. Her parents emphasized the importance of education in their home, and she appreciates the chance to be a part of the education of others. Michele would like to read the books she hasn't read yet on the HS Curriculum!

**VIVIAN DAI: LMS/UMS Common Arts Culinary Skill Building**

Vivian Dai received her BA in Ancient Greek and Latin from Boston University and her MAT in Latin and Classical Humanities from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She is also the recipient of various fellowships and awards for her scholarship and teaching, including the John Oddy Memorial Award from Boston University, the Zeph Stewart Latin Teacher Training Award from the Society of Classical Studies, and the Helen Maria Chestnutt Scholarship from the Classical Association from New England. The mild climate of California and SLOCA's steadfast commitment to Classical Education drew her back to her native California, where she now teaches not only Latin but also Culinary Arts.