Kansas English

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Kansas Association of Teachers of English

Sun Seeker by Jenni Bader

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Kansas English Author Guide

Kansas English is the peer-reviewed journal of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English (KATE). It publishes articles and materials on subjects of interest to English teachers, including scholarly articles, reflective/practitioner essays, opinion pieces, interviews, book reviews, and creative works (including photos and artwork). *Kansas English* publishes about 80 percent of the manuscripts it receives each year. Specifically, consider submitting the following types of manuscripts:

1. **Practitioner Pieces** describing how you teach a particular text, skill, or concept in your English language arts classroom.
2. **Scholarly Articles**, including research studies and academic arguments supported by research in English education.
3. **Reflective Essays** about teaching English language arts.
4. **Creative Works** (e.g., poetry, vignettes, photography) related to teaching English.
5. **Interviews** with authors (YA and adult) and experts in the field of English language arts.
6. **Book Reviews** of recently published young adult literature and English pedagogy texts.
7. **Conversation Pieces** in response to previously published work in *Kansas English*.
8. **Kansas-Specific Articles** that would be of interest to Kansas English teachers.

Deadline for submissions for the 2019 issue of *Kansas English*: January 15, 2019

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

Manuscripts should typically not exceed 15 pages, excluding references. Submissions should be in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced throughout (including quotations and bibliographies), and adhere to the latest edition of APA documentation style. The names of submitting authors should not appear anywhere in the manuscript. All scholarly articles and practitioner pieces should include an abstract (no more than 200 words) and a list of keywords.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically as attachments to Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu. In the subject line, please write Kansas English Manuscript Submission. All manuscripts should be written using a recent version of Microsoft Word. Please also indicate the type of submission (e.g., practitioner piece, scholarly article, reflective essay) based on the categories above, as this will inform the peer review process.

Complete submissions include, as separate attachments:

1. A manuscript without references to the author(s) to ensure the piece is blinded.
2. A title page with names, affiliations, mailing addresses, and 100-150 word professional biographies for each submitting author, as well as a brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

REVIEW PROCESS

Each manuscript receives a blind review by at least two members of the review board, unless the content or length makes it inappropriate for the journal. The review board typically makes a final decision regarding publication within three months of the posted submission deadline. Submitted manuscripts may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style.

Kansas English 2018, Volume 99, Number 1

From the Editor

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading the 2018 issue of *Kansas English*, which contains an invigorating and inspiring collection of teaching reflections, creative works, and scholarly arguments. Each piece offers insight and nourishment as we consider our teaching, our students, and our profession. Here's an overview of this issue to whet your appetite:

Brooke Johnson kicks things off with "Dear Tired Teacher" and the important reminder to take care of ourselves. In this honest and moving piece, Johnson encourages us to ask for help, to share our stories, and to resist the tyranny of perfectionism—all from the perspective of a "recovering tired teacher."

In "Teaching MacGyver to Write," **Victoria Opalewski** reflects on the many ways that her students—sometimes the most challenging ones—teach her about resilience, creativity, and, most importantly, making connections and nurturing those relationships.

Carolyn L. Carlson explores book banning in "Jazz, Drama, and a Librarian: Advocating Against Book Censorship in Public Schools." In this article, Carlson argues in support of access to diverse books that can serve as windows and mirrors for young readers—and provides resources and advice to help us do so.

In "*Speak*, Trigger Warnings, and Listening to Student Needs," **Andrea Marshbank** ponders the importance of considering student needs in relation to text selection and other sensitive course content. Marshbank's honest sharing of her experience encourages us all to reflect on teachable moments—not just for our students, but for *ourselves*.

Abigail Crane reflects on her childhood reading of *Little Women* and subsequent writing experiences in "Becoming Jo March." She reveals how she now uses her own writing process to encourage her students to be both fearless and empowered in their writing and story-telling.

In her practitioner piece "Utilizing Imitation to Jumpstart Creation in Writing," **Aleisha Christner** describes how she uses mentor texts in her composition lessons to teach students how to imitate the structure and craft of a piece, thus enhancing their writing and their confidence.

Judy Sansom analyzes John Knowles' 1959 classic young adult novel from a queer theory perspective in "The Tree of Panic in *A Separate Peace*." In this article, Sansom argues that the tree from which Gene and Finny leap symbolizes the biblical tree of knowledge and functions as a phallic symbol that represents forbidden desire.

And finally, **Vicki Sherbert** offers a blessing to her students prior to the start of student teaching in "Beyond this Night." In this poem, Sherbert, encourages these future teachers to remember that they are "more than enough" as they embrace this next opportunity for learning and growth.

So, dear reader, I hope that you savor and enjoy each of these pieces. Perhaps they will offer you some new ideas for approaching teaching and learning. Perhaps they will help you reflect on your own journey in this profession. Perhaps they will provide some encouragement and rejuvenation, as you consider this collegial community of English teachers. Perhaps they will inspire you to write and share your own ideas with readers of *Kansas English*. I hope so! We'd love to hear from you. Please check out the call for manuscripts, and contact me with any questions.

Until next time, happy teaching and learning!

Katherine Mason Cramer

Dear Tired Teacher

Brooke Johnson

Dear Tired Teacher,

I see you. I see you taking another minute to unjam the copier in the teacher's lounge one more time before it spits out the day's work. I see your smile welcoming each student into your classroom every hour, every day. I see the seemingly organized chaos with objectives and essential questions on the board. I see you giving advice to the college intern standing by your side from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave. I see you at lunch with students eating in your room, met with the laughter of friends who join them.

I see you after school hurriedly helping a student, a colleague, or honestly, just taking a second to stop at the restroom. I see you rushing to those leadership meetings. I see you walking to your car but first detouring to the gym to support your students from afar. By the time you leave, the sun has set and you drive, once again, in the dark of the day.

Tired teacher, maybe you're outwardly tired from the tailspin of your first-year teaching. Lord knows it's hard. Maybe you're secretly tired because you have years of experience and are equipped with skills to run the building. Lord knows you'll end up doing more than your fair share. Maybe you're mind numbingly tired from wondering if it's all worth it. Are you making any difference in that little overstuffed 80-degree classroom brimming with bodies breathing too much hot air, adding to the heat index you desperately wish to escape? Lord knows not a soul can work effectively in that sauna.

I see you. Can I stop you for just one second? Listen closely. "Please, take care of yourself!" Let those words sink in and linger on your own lips.

I know it's not going to click for you right now. No, you will keep pushing forward, shouldering too much responsibility, too much emotional burden, too much perfection planned on paper, too much overthinking about convincing your colleagues to keep trying new things, and too little space for yourself.

It's ok. I can see the tired weariness straining behind those eyes and that smile as you respond, "No really, I'm fine. I've got this." We both know you don't.

You will break. The last hour. The last day. Right before Thanksgiving Break. You will break. This break will be the undoing of all the little cracks forming over the last several months. This break will leave you panicked and in tears staring at your desk while students crowd around. They know something is wrong. They hear it in your labored breathing and see it in your vacant eyes. Saved by the final bell, you're left in an empty room but your panicked breathing still haunts you. The tears will keep streaming on and off for days. The doctor will speak the words "situational depression and anxiety" as your mind tries to wrap your head around the diagnosis.

I see you. Suddenly, you see you too.

You see your fragile state staring back in the mirror. You hear your own voice softer, weaker as you force yourself to speak to students, colleagues, and staff. You grow silent all together because

speaking requires energy you no longer possess. You taste the salty tears at the end of the day brought on by exhaustion coursing through your body and brain. You feel the need to curl up under a blanket on the couch and stay there until morning. Then you bring your fragile tired self to do it all over again.

Can I stop you now, dear tired teacher? You seem to have a few extra seconds, seeing as how you're too weary to pack up. As you sit and muster the energy to leave for the day let me just take a second to gently remind you, "Please, take care of yourself."

In this moment, you listen. It clicks. These words offer hope. You respond with a simple nod. You take your things and go. You walk out that door and make some time for yourself.

You ask for help from people you never thought you'd need. You begin the process of untangling all those wound-up expectations you never actually had to meet. As part of the process you take time to sit and list precisely who you are. Teacher...the clock ticks on….until you remember you are more than a teacher. A friend, foodie, reader, writer, sports enthusiast, and lover of naps! Yeah, you are more than a teacher. You keep this list tucked inside a safe space as a reminder. You are more whole and complex than you believed.

Then there's the sticky notes scribbled with permission slips. You've formed the habit of prescribing permission to do certain things. When you see a sticky note stuck to your desk you crack a smile: *You have permission to laugh today*. You then find yesterday's permission slip crumpled in your jeans pocket: *You have permission to be present and not perfect*. Which is good because you're presently wearing yesterday's jeans because that's just how life goes. You crack another smile at this thought and there you go laughing again. You're finding the freedom in permission to do what you never did before. You have grace for yourself.

This, my dear tired teacher, is the beginning of a new you. A new rhythm. A new way of teaching. A new way of living. You will never be wholly the same again. I can confidently say you will come out on the other side stronger and freer. A newfound bravery to try new things, both big and small, will wiggle its way into your classroom and your life. A liberating ability to embrace imperfection will slowly bring light back to your eyes, igniting a fire in your students. The courage to laugh again will return, becoming the soundtrack of your classroom.

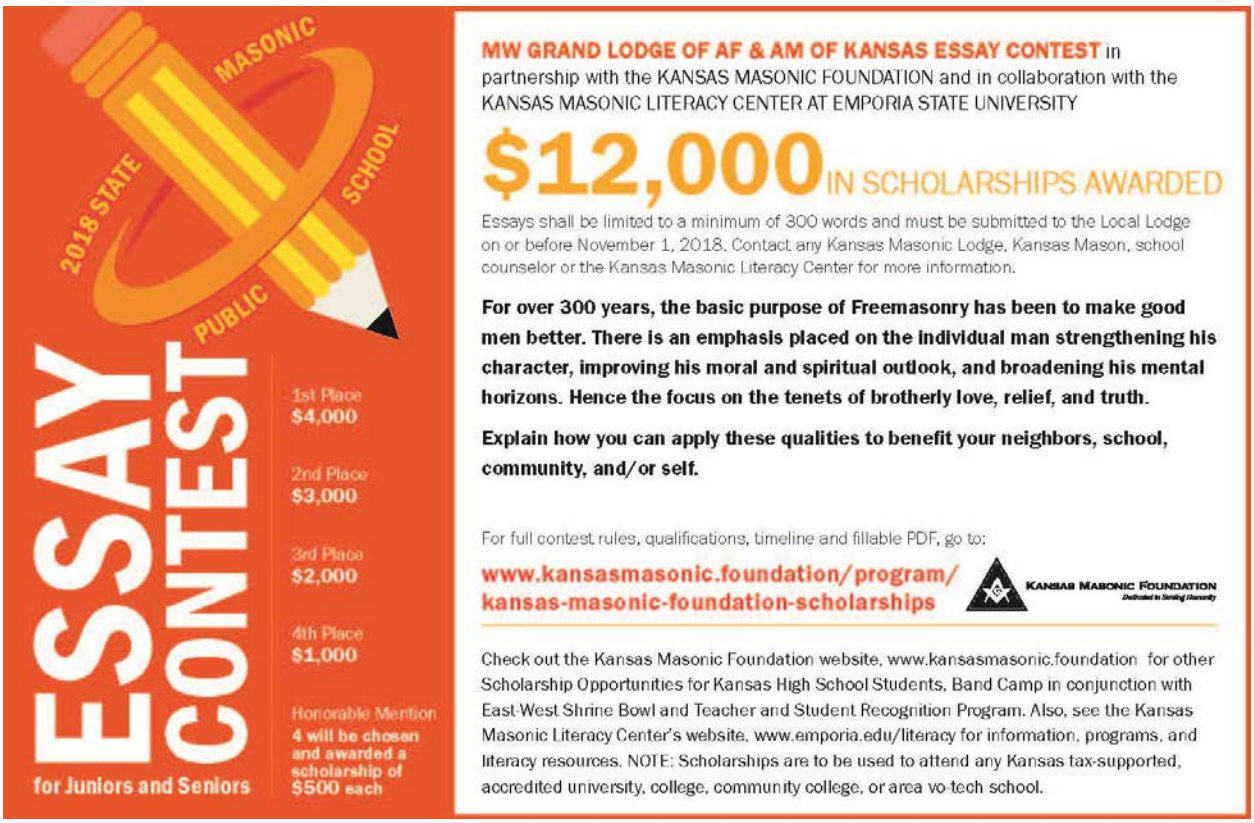
This, my dear tired teacher, is what taking care of yourself looks like. You are more than a teacher. You are an honest mirror, giving hope to each student and colleague straining to relinquish their all too tired perfection. Let them see your flaws and hear your story. Set the pace for them to live again both in and out of those four walls of their classroom.

Sincerely,
A Recovering Tired Teacher

Author Biography

Brooke Johnson was born and raised in Wichita, KS. She loves the wide-open spaces but continually feels the need to travel abroad. After graduating from WSU in 2008, she taught English language arts at Wichita North High School for nine years. Six of those years she worked with the AVID system, encouraging students to seize every opportunity they could for their future. Currently,

Brooke teaches ESOL English language arts at Wichita East High School. Recently she received her MLA degree from Baker University with an emphasis in literature. Brooke is also a National Staff Developer for AVID, where she trains other content teachers in AVID reading strategies that can help increase rigor and comprehension in the classroom for all students. Brooke was the 2015 Summer Teacher Speaker at the Dallas AVID Summer institute. She enjoys sharing her stories and lessons learned in the classroom. She can be reached at bjohnson8@usd259.net.



Teaching MacGyver to Write

Victoria Opalewski

When I started my career, I was positive I would be flawless and effective. English was really one of the only things I loved and was good at, so my students would easily pick it up as I taught.

Sounds pretty on paper, doesn't it?

Reality set in during my student teaching, in the form of a student I'll call Mac in my section of junior English. He was always on the verge of failing. I don't think he even cracked the cover of *Huck Finn*, and his research paper was on a common subject that obviously didn't interest him, so it was a half-hearted attempt. Mac was also a mechanical genius farm kid. He stayed up late and woke up early, and he could fix anything with an engine. I mean that quite literally.

The entire junior class fit into two buses, and we were headed out on an hour-long journey to see a play. I think it was *The Foreigner*, which is about a man in a new town who chooses to let everyone believe he can't understand or speak English.

My class's bus was bringing up the rear. As we were going up a hill, the bus began to lose power. The engine raced as the driver pushed his pedal into the floor, but there was none of the diesel power that should have been behind it. We coasted to a stop alongside the highway.

These were the days before cell phones, so the driver used the radio to call the garage. It would take too long to get someone to come fix the bus to allow us to see the play. As the news filtered through the seats that we'd be stuck on the side of the road until our bus was fixed, then return to school as the other bus of kids got to watch a play, it turned ugly.

Mac sauntered up to the front of the bus. He casually popped the hatch covering the engine, which to my surprise was inside the bus, near the driver. He looked at a few things, asked the driver to manipulate some pedals, and before I could understand what was happening, he was surveying the passengers for random objects like twist ties and paper clips. I joked to my mentor teacher that we weren't in an episode of *MacGyver*. How could he fix a bus, let alone with what we had available?

Mac was soon lying on his stomach in the aisle, and I heard him mumbling to the driver. He shrugged and cranked the key. The bus inched forward, much to my astonishment. Mac popped up on his feet, closed the hatch and wiped his hands on his jeans. He had his head tucked modestly down, but he did raise his hands over his head to a roar of cheers as he made his way back to his seat. And why not? Without a doubt, he was the hero of the day. We even made it just in time for the play.

Despite Mac's prowess with the bus engine, he wasn't making the cut in my class, so when final grades came due, I assigned the dismal grade he had earned on the assignments I had given.

I like to think Mac is rolling in success and money as the owner of a mechanic's shop somewhere, but I just don't know what happened to him after that year. I went on to teach for 15 years in high schools before moving to community college and university settings, but I still think about Mac's grade in my class. It used to make me feel like I'm the one who failed him.

Initially, I thought of him when I used an unorthodox method to reach a kid.

I thought of Mac the time I dug out the marginally appropriate short story "Two in One," about a taxidermy assistant who murders his boss and puts on the skin to avoid getting caught, only to get arrested for his own murder. It was a stretch, but the kid loved it, and it helped illustrate irony. That student also read whatever I assigned the rest of the semester, often stopping in after school to tell me which stories she liked.

I thought of Mac during the hours I spent scribing on dozens of different graphic organizers for that student who had great ideas but horrible organization, until she finally looked at the paper, grabbed it so hard it crumpled. "I get it! I can do it on my own now." She could, and she did.

I thought of Mac with the kid who could not think of a single topic he was passionate about outside of football, so he gave all his speeches—informative, demonstrative, and persuasive—on that one topic. I inwardly groaned, but it was about the student's learning, not my comfort. Was the assignment for me, or for the kids?

The answer is so obvious, but when we're inundated with standards and pacing guides, it can be hard to keep that focus.

I also think of Mac when I've failed to connect to students.

I thought of Mac when I discovered a student was intentionally failing my class to avoid graduation and get back at her dad. I didn't figure it out until the third go-round, and then I simply didn't show her a single grade until after it was too late to tank the semester. Success, perhaps, as she graduated, but did I really fix the problem?

I thought of Mac when I met with a student, adjusting deadlines and helping her plan out a path to finish. She didn't officially drop my class, but I never saw or heard from her again despite my calls and emails.

If my classrooms were set in an episode of *MacGyver*, I could be an instant hero. But I'm a teacher, just an optimistic realist. So, I've had to try several alternatives before I hit on one that works for the many Macs I've taught. And then I must realize that sometimes, despite all my efforts, I am still not able to reach a student in the way I would have liked. That one is tough for me. What am I supposed to do with that?

The last piece of the puzzle came with a student I'll call Sarge. He was the type of kid whom I met with several times a week regarding classroom behavior and motivation for an entire semester. Most days, Sarge left me feeling completely defeated. Because I believe I hold onto specific memories and experiences to teach me something later, I'd force my thoughts back to Mac when I got frustrated. I kept trying, but I kept failing.

I was relieved when Sarge passed. I was tired of the almost daily reminders that I couldn't figure him out.

Some time later, I was in the middle of teaching a class and heard a knock on my door. Sarge stood there in uniform, hat in his hands. He was home on a short break from military school. "Can I come in and talk to your class for a second? I just want to tell them that it's worth it. What you do here is all for them. And I can tune up any attitudes you need me to," he offered, puffing up his chest and holding his arms out from his body like a bodybuilder in competition.

I was so stunned I honestly can't remember my response. My repeated attempts had had zero effect on Sarge's attitude, motivation, or behavior, and I'd had only moderate success on the

English skills front. I wish I could adequately articulate what that random knock on my classroom door meant to me. Had the attempts I'd viewed as failing ultimately succeeded?

It seems that Mac had ultimately "MacGyvered" me. I'd spent so long thinking he taught me just to try different methods to get kids to learn my subject area, yet what he really taught me was far more basic, fundamental. It's not always about teaching them English. If I kept trying, what I was really doing, aside from furthering my curriculum, was acknowledging them, seeing their needs and trying to make a difference.

I now realize he was not only MacGyver that day, but he was also like the protagonist in *The Foreigner* who "didn't know" English. Because everyone thought he didn't understand what was going on, he ended up saving the townspeople.

Dramatic, perhaps, but this lesson has helped me shift my focus from teaching English to teaching as a series of intricate human relationships. It may not be as measurable in AP scores or accolades, but it's made me happier in my career.

Of course, because I'm human, I still obsess about the few negatives in a sea of positives. But I keep my thin "good things" file, and I go back and reread the emails and cards from over the years when I become fixated. It reminds me that perhaps I'm just helping to shape genuine humans, rather than creating scholars. I'm okay with that.

Author Biography

Victoria Opalewski is a Clinical Educator for the School of Education at Wichita State University, specifically working with the middle/secondary team. Previously, she taught English and public speaking at the high school level and coached forensics and Academic Decathlon speaking and interviewing; she also directed plays in Wisconsin, substituted in Iowa, and taught at Hutchinson Community College. Writing and reading are two of her favorite pastimes, but family, cooking, and traveling—often all three at once—are the biggest part of her life. Obnoxiously optimistic is the way she most often describes herself. She can be reached at victoria.opalewski@wichita.edu.

Jazz, Drama, and a Librarian: Advocating Against Book Censorship in Public Schools

Carolyn L. Carlson

Abstract
Each year, books are challenged and/or banned from public school libraries across the country and most recently there has been an increased number of books with diverse characters banned from public schools. Removing books from public schools restricts students' abilities to read and reflect upon these texts. Students have a right to access books depicting characters and events that they can relate to and characters and events that they can learn from. These books can become "mirrors" to the reader or "windows" to the world around the reader. Administrators, teachers, librarians, students, parents, and community members should advocate for access to books of all types for all students.

Keywords
literacy, censorship, book banning, school libraries, advocacy

Introduction

Each year, books are challenged and/or banned from public school libraries across the country. Removing books from school libraries restricts students' abilities to read and reflect upon these texts. This negatively impacts all students because it prevents students from seeing themselves in the books and it prevents students from learning about others from reading the books. As Smolkin and Young (2011) note, "such books are seen as self-affirming mirrors for children of a given culture and as windows into other lives for children outside that given culture" (p. 217).

All students deserve the opportunity to see themselves in literature. For these students, books become "mirrors" that reflect their own lives. All students (students with disabilities, students in rural settings, students with diverse backgrounds, etc.) need to see themselves in literature – sometimes those "controversial" texts are the ones that students can relate to the most and removing them also removes the chance for a student to connect with a text. In addition to giving students the opportunity to "see themselves" in literature, other students (not those necessarily with the same characteristics as the ones found in the text) can learn from reading these types of texts. These books become "windows" to new information and help readers develop an understanding and an appreciation of the diversity that exists in their school, town, state, country, and the world. Books are sometimes the only place where readers may meet people who are not like themselves and who, therefore, offer alternative worldviews (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014).

All children have a right to access books that reflect their own images and books that open less familiar worlds to them (Bishop, 2012). However, books are routinely challenged and banned throughout the country. Administrators, teachers, librarians, students, parents, and community members should advocate for access to books of all types for all students.

Background

In 1982, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in Board of Education, Island Trees v. Pico by Pico, which addressed the removal of certain books from a public school library by the Board of Education members who felt the books were "anti-American, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, and just plain filthy" (Board of Education). In its decision, the Supreme Court stated that a balance must be struck between the school's role as an educator and the students' rights of access to materials. However, the Court ruled that local school boards may not remove books from the library

shelves "simply because its members disagreed with their idea content" (Board of Education). The Supreme Court's ruling in 1982, however, did not cease the challenges made to books in public school libraries. Typically, in a school setting, a book is "challenged" by a parent, community member, administrator, etc. and then that challenge is reviewed (typically by the district school board). The school board (or other group) either denies the challenge (leaving the book in place) or approves the challenge (resulting in a "ban" of the book).

In recent years, multiple challenges (some proving successful) were made to books in various parts of the country for various reasons. Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007) was removed from a high school supplemental reading list after parents complained that it was "anti-Christian" (American Library Association [ALA], 2014a). Green's *Looking for Alaska* (2006) was challenged, but retained, at a high school because it was labeled "too racy to read" (ALA, 2014b). In 2014, Harris' *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health* (2009) was challenged at a middle school library because of its depiction of cartoon nudity (ALA, 2014a). Each of these incidents represents the continual controversy in our society over what is appropriate literature in public schools.

Recent Shifts in Challenges

Recent research has indicated that the *type* of books that are challenged and/or banned has shifted. While twenty years ago books that depicted drug use, sex, or offensive language were most often included on the American Library Association (ALA)'s list of the most banned/challenged books, more recently it has become books containing diversity as a theme that have begun repeatedly being banned/challenged. Books that focus on different races, religious minorities, people with disabilities, LGBT identities, etc. have pushed out books with offensive language, drug use, and sex on the lists of the most banned/challenged books. Begley (2016) notes that the shift "seems to be linked to demographic changes in the country—and the political fear-mongering that can accompany those changes" (p. 1). According to the ALA (2016), the most challenged books in 2015 included two books about transgender people, two books containing homosexuality, and two books featuring Muslim characters.

For example, in 2015, a group of parents in Florida requested the removal of *The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq* (Winter, 2005) from the schools in the Duval County School District. The book is based on the true story of Alia Muhammad Baker, a librarian who saved 30,000 books from the Basra library's collection before the building was burned in a fire. The book was awarded one of the ALA's 2006 Notable Children's Books (ALA, 2007) and was chosen as the city of Philadelphia's "One Book, One Philadelphia" book (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2017). Despite its message of courage and determination, the parents that challenged the book's inclusion in the school library found it "inappropriate for promoting another religion that is not Christianity" (Thompson, 2015; ALA, 2015b).

In addition, despite a message of anti-bullying and acceptance, *I Am Jazz* (Herthel & Jennings, 2014) was the third most challenged book of 2015 (ALA, 2016a) and the fourth most challenged book of 2016 (ALA, 2017). The book is based upon the life of co-author Jazz Jennings and her experience as a transgender child. According to the ALA (2017), the requests to remove the book from public schools throughout the country were based upon the depiction of a transgender child, offensive viewpoints, and being unsuitable for children. In 2015, in response to a transgender child enrolled in the school, a primary school in Wisconsin planned to read the book to its student body to educate and inform the students of the topic (Diaz, 2017; ALA, 2016b). The school was threatened with a lawsuit if the book was read (Diaz, 2017). Despite the school's cancellation of the reading, the local library held the reading which was attended by 600 community members and one of the authors (Diaz, 2017).

Further, according to the ALA (2017), the second most challenged book of 2016 was *Drama* (Telgemeier, 2012). This graphic novel depicts the story of a middle school girl who deals with, among other things, her "crushes" at school. The story, which also was one of the most challenged books in 2014 (ALA, 2015a) contains a scene in which a male student has to take over the role of the female lead in the school play at the last minute—resulting in an onstage kiss with another male. This onstage kiss between two males in the school's musical performance resulted in multiple challenges against the book. According to the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (2016), the book was challenged at a junior high in Texas due to its "socially offensive" nature—and the book was banned from the school.

This shift in banning books containing these types of diverse characters threatens the opportunities for students to learn about themselves and the world around them. In today's society, it is essential that students have access to books that depict diverse identities—so that they can relate to those characters or learn about others from those characters.

Advocating for Access

It is imperative that students have access to texts depicting all types of ideas and people—including ones like themselves and ones unlike themselves. Books should be accessible to students to serve as a mirror of the reader or a window to the world. Through connecting with character or events in a story or gaining new knowledge about differences among people, students can learn about themselves and others, leading to a more informed citizenry.

It is the responsibility of a library to serve everyone (Jacobson, 2016). Teachers, librarians, administrators, school specialists, parents, and community members should be encouraged to support the inclusion of books about a variety of topics in school libraries. This does not necessarily mean these books should be required reading—rather, these books should simply be made available to students in the school library so that they have the opportunity to read them if they choose to do so. Many students may not live near a public library and many may not have internet access at home, so the school library becomes one of the main resources for students to learn about themselves and the world around them. If there are multiple voices opposing banning books and advocating for access, individuals challenging books may gain new information regarding the importance of their inclusion. By vocalizing a position that students need to have access to books that depict people like themselves and people unlike themselves, challenges based on a misunderstanding of the importance of this may lessen.

More specifically, in order to protect student access to books, the following two specific recommendations are made:

1. **Avoid "Restricted" Sections**. In order to accommodate the concerns of individuals who find books inappropriate, some school districts have implemented "restricted" sections where "controversial" books are kept and can only be checked out by students with parent/guardian permission. This only encourages the belief that the content within those texts is "wrong" or "forbidden." For example, if a school library shelves a book about a family with same-sex parents in its "restricted" section, a student with a similar family dynamic is taught that a family like that is so different, abnormal, and unacceptable that special written permission must first be obtained before he can read the book. Further, it conveys to other students the same message—that book about families such as those are so offensive that they cannot be kept on the same shelf as books about "acceptable" families. This segregation of the books can create a further divide among students—from those students feeling like their lifestyle is inadequate to possibly reinforcing that notion to other students who see that books containing that

content do not deserve a place on the "regular" shelf in the library. While designating sections as "Young Adult" or "Older Readers" is acceptable, restricting access to books is not. Making texts available to all students (without the stigma of being "restricted") might provide students with a sense of being "accepted" and might send the message to others that differences are valued.

2. **Require Reading and Discussion.** According to the School Library Journal's Controversial Books Survey (2016), the majority of challenges originate from parents, especially in elementary schools. More specifically, 92% of challenges in elementary schools and 80% of challenges in high schools are made by parents (Jacobson, 2016). In order to have an informative, productive conversation about the challenged book, the challenger (most often a parent) should be required to read and discuss the book with a group of other parents, librarians, teachers, students, etc. Some challenges are made without the challenger having read the entire book, but instead just a paragraph. Without full knowledge of the entire text, the challenger cannot have an informed opinion about it. Further, a discussion about the book's content will give the challenger an opportunity to hear how the book may be a positive resource for students—perhaps in ways the challenger had not thought of before. Listening to teachers, librarians, and, in particular, students discuss the text may provide an opportunity for an eye-opening discussion that results in the dismissal of the challenge. Even if the challenge remains in place, a thorough reading of the book as well as a respectful discussion about the book should occur.

Summary

Students have a right to access books depicting characters and events that they can relate to and characters and events that they can learn from. Denying students the opportunity to access information encourages and reinforces ideas that certain topics are wrong and unacceptable. Schools should strive to give students opportunities to learn about the world around them. By advocating for access and eliminating barriers to books, public school libraries can fulfill their responsibility to serve all students.

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Speak, Trigger Warnings, and Listening to Student Needs

Andrea Marshbank

English language arts is a vulnerable subject. It involves self-expression, serious reflection, and deep discussion in a way that I did not understand when completing my pre-service teaching program. Entering this profession last year, I was pleasantly surprised by the complex subjects my students were eager to write about. Excited, I grabbed ahold of their engagement. We used it as fuel. My students have written essays, podcasts, and blogs on their home-life struggles, the unbelievable pressures of high school, and the microaggressive acts of racism teachers can not quite catch in the hallways. Together, my students and I learned that writing and talking about these issues creates positive change. I loved giving my students the chance to write about and discuss hard topics in my classroom. On the days when we cleared out the mumbo-jumbo of "normal" class expectations, when we simply talked and wrote about real world issues, it was those days that were special. They were meaningful. My kids asked for more days like them, and I tried to honor that request.

One of the ways I did that is by assigning literature that matters—literature that is courageous and bold, literature that takes nuanced topics and folds them into beautiful characters, literature with heart wrenching symbolism and page turning plot. I am confident I do all of those things when I teach my regular sections of English classes the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. We read it aloud last spring, going slowly, and seriously considering all aspects of this engaging novel.

When I gave my Honors ninth grade students the book on a whim—it previously was not in their curriculum—I felt I was doing a good deed. I had given them a relevant novel, with little expectations, other than for them to read it over that month. It was a spur of the moment assignment, in replacement of a different mini unit. No study guides or pop quizzes. None of the bulk that makes students get caught up in the *school* part of school readings.

I had good intentions. I wanted my students to be comfortable discussing the serious side of important issues like mental illness and sexual assault. I wanted them to look at Melinda Sordino's experience, one of tragedy and strength, and see the meaning within it. Empathy is a key part of learning and *Speak* is an excellent learning tool. I was confident this group would take Anderson's work and create something impressive. To their credit, they did. Just not in the way I expected.

The surprise came to me on the day of my most nerve wracking lesson. During this class period, students spent their time at four stations learning about the context of the issue that sits at the heart of Anderson's *Speak:* rape. One station addressed the controversy of the young adult novel, asking if it should be taught in schools at all. Another station addressed the male perspective of sexual assault by demonstrating that this is an issue that affects everyone—not just women. The next station included articles on current events, like the #metoo movement and *Time*'s recognition of "The Silence Breakers" as their Person of the Year. Lastly, students learned about what rape culture is and how it influences the world around us. There is a great deal of nonfiction reading and evidence-based writing involved for each station, but, of course, that is not what made this lesson difficult.

The struggle with this lesson comes from my concern that my students will be upset, rude, horrified, or anything in between. I worry that they will look at this material as another teacher pushing their liberal agenda, and not as a discussion of real life. Most of all, I worry that I will not be able to handle their questions. If I cannot address the skepticism that unfairly surrounds the topic of rape, what will that say about me?

Regardless, I taught the lesson.

I walked around the various stations, conversing briefly with students, taking their temperature on the topic. How are things going? Does everything make sense? And, of course, the most important question to ask a budding mind: What do you think? A young woman, whom I respect and admire, responded:

"You should have given us a trigger warning before you had us read *Speak*."

It was this well-spoken sentence said by a caring student that set me on my heels for days. This was strange. The moments that we take home with us long after the final bell seem to be loud or tear-filled. To my surprise, this moment was none of those. A simple truth had emerged from my classroom.

The young woman continued. "We really respect that you chose to teach this book, we get that it's a big deal, but a trigger warning would have been nice. Some of us were really thrown off when you just tossed us a book and we did not know anything about it and then it turned out to be about rape." Two other students were at the station and, when I looked to them, nodded in agreement.

I was immediately embarrassed. My face became warm and my voice high pitched. Outwardly, I expressed sympathy and understanding with comments like, "I really appreciate your input, I had not thought of that." Inwardly, I felt shame. She was absolutely right. I had made a mistake.

I should have given more preface to this book. For that lesson alone, I had warned my students that we would cover a difficult topic. As a result, one student requested to opt out and was completing alternate work in a different classroom. Another student had inexplicably not shown up that day. I do not know why these students chose a different path on this day, and the explicit reason does not matter. It is none of my business. The experiences of my students are valid, no matter what they are, and I can never presume to know what is happening in their lives. I can only support them.

However, if I had that much response to simply letting them know a lesson would be sensitive, what could they have felt when I handed them a book without any trigger warning on these same issues?

Trigger warnings get a bad rap in the field of education. Some teachers fear that they are coddling our students when they allow them the freedom to choose whether or not to interact with the material. These teachers argue that trigger warnings do not exist in the real world; kids need to learn how to deal with difficult content. This argument is incorrect. As adults, we have the power to leave scenarios that cause us to feel uncomfortable. We can change jobs, exit the movie theater, or simply drive away from offensive situations. Students are not permitted do that in the classroom without serious repercussions. Offering students a trigger warning for sensitive content is a way to empower students to make the best decisions for themselves. That is a lesson that is worth its own weight.

It is incredibly important to teach novels like *Speak,* to talk freely about the problems of mental illness and rape, and to do it in a safe classroom environment. However, part of building a safe classroom environment is giving students opportunities to let their teachers know that they are triggered. While discomfort is the ultimate symptom of impactful learning, my students need to know that I will respect their needs during these difficult times of learning.

In the future, I will not nonchalantly hand my students *Speak* without a trigger warning. Rest assured, I will still hand it to them, but I will also give them the tools they need to be safe in my classroom. If at any point in time my students feel concerned while reading, I will invite them to skip that section of the novel. If they are upset during a classroom lesson, they will be permitted to go to the hallway. If they feel the need to mentally distance themselves from the conversations we engage

in by not speaking, I will respect that. It is critical that we remember to give our students appropriate ways to exit the space when they are triggered.

It has become more and more apparent to me that we need to listen closely to what our students are saying. I have heard multiple teachers rationalize that they no longer ask the opinions of their students because, "They don't know what I know." That exact statement shows the beauty of asking your students what they need in lessons. Students know different things than we do. They know themselves.

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Andrea Marshbank is a second-year English language arts teacher and assistant debate and forensics coach at Seaman High School. She is also a Teacher Leader for the National Writing Project, a 2018 Kansas Horizon Award Nominee, and frequent guest blogger for Edutopia. Ms. Marshbank has spoken about her award-winning writing on EduTalk Radio, presented at the 2017 National Council of Teachers of English Convention on teaching students digital literacy to improve online research skills, and at the 2017 Mid-America Association for Computers in Education Conference on using film as literature in the English classroom. Check out her blog at www.themarshbankclassroom.com or contact her at andreamarshbank@gmail.com.

Becoming Jo March

Abigail Crane

When I was a girl, I read *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. The beauty of this book is that the reader can see pieces of herself in every March sister, and I was no exception. Mostly, I sought flattering comparisons: Amy's creativity, Beth's selflessness, Meg's nurturing spirit, Jo's ambition. But I carry no shortage of ineptitudes, particularly with Jo's rashness. All too often I found myself biting my tongue, and like Jo, ending up receiving a good scolding from my own Marmee. Despite these imperfections, Jo became a kindred spirit of mine. Her ambition and love of writing awoke something in me. I, too, became a writer after reading this book. I begged my mom to purchase journals for me, and if I was good and did my chores and went to Sunday school, she would laminate and bind the pages together. I developed my own series of stories, each volume detailing coming-of-age experiences, like fighting with siblings, or a good friend moving across the country. The experiences in those stories were my experiences, and through this fictional world I was able to better understand my own; in this way, I sought to become Jo March.

Jo began her writing career exploring the passions, dramas, and mysteries: the little play-acting of her childhood. Two-bit magazines published these topics, and her readers sought superficial distractions from their daily lives. But Jo was better than these little fantasies. She realized that good writing, above money or praise, seeks "truth, beauty, and earnestness" (Alcott, 1868-1869, p. 320). Writing helps us see our world more clearly and inspires readers to pursue our dreams with greater conviction. Although I am not the professional writer I once dreamed, I found a better dream. Like Jo, I became a teacher. My joy springs from teaching others to write for the purposes of better understanding ourselves and our world. If I accomplish nothing else in my short life, I will be satisfied.

My own writing experiences all have one thing in common: the struggle. Writing is never easy and comes only at the expense of great toil and effort, revision, and polishing. I have always appreciated the axiom: "I hate writing, I love having written." The same is true for me. As a teacher, I push my students to become lifelong readers and writers. I firmly believe that I must meet the standards that I demand of my pupils, and because of this, I created a blog. If I ask my students to publish their words in a public forum, I do the same. Is anyone actually reading anything I post? Most likely not. But the vulnerability of putting myself out there for others too—especially my students—is what matters. They see me struggle along with them. This choice to publish my writing stems from a deep belief that in a democracy, citizens cannot allow themselves to become passive consumers of text and media. By telling my stories, I join the conversation. I fear too many of us are guilty of passively consuming text rather than creating and sharing it, and therefore we become vulnerable to the loudest voices in the room. My hope is to model active participation for my students. Even if the conversation they choose to enter does not involve writing specifically, but media production—like podcast development or movie making—they tell their stories, and this is my ultimate end goal as an educator. When I create something—*anything*—I become Jo March: fearlessly telling my own story.

So what is the purpose of writing, professionally, academically, or personally? I want my students to feel like Jo March, too. I want them to find out their truths and tell their stories, especially those students who are too often silenced. The school where I teach serves a significant Latino population. Too few of their stories have been told. My goal is to equip them, and other disenfranchised students like them, to share their truths with the world. Without their voices, our world is a lot less beautiful. Jo March knew that women's voices, like Latino voices, or LGBTQ voices, or voices of color, are often minimized, if heard at all. Representation matters. Writing is a

tool to widen representation. I hope my students one day find themselves sitting at the proverbial table of opportunity, but in reality, gatekeepers guard the entryway. Students must write well so that the gatekeepers let them through. These gatekeepers guard many things: power, influence, careers. Writing is the main faculty to demonstrate some sense of intelligence, self, and education. A great burden is placed upon us educators, especially language arts teachers like ourselves. We must equip students to write well, or else gates become locked and opportunities lost. If our singular role is to prepare students for their futures, writing should be one of our core tenants of instruction.

Writing is a messy process that requires great struggle, revision, and perseverance, but when young people become equipped with the skills to write their own stories, opportunities arise before them. Writing shapes the world around us, voices our opinions, and makes our ideas heard. Together, we—teacher and student—can begin the process in the classroom. We should not passively consume text as readers, but create a seat at the table. Our futures depend on the young people in our classrooms telling their own stories. The burden is heavy, and at times feels overwhelming, but we embrace the challenge with purpose and passion, because there is too much at stake otherwise. Becoming Jo March is something all of us can do—we just have to be brave enough to begin.

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Abigail Crane is a high school language arts teacher in Olathe, Kansas, where she has been teaching for four years. Abigail earned a B.S. in Secondary English Education from the University of Kansas, and a M.S. in Curriculum Leadership from Emporia State University. She intends to pursue National Board Certification in 2018. Her favorite things are words, her cat, coffee, her husband, and her students. Not in that order. Follow her on Twitter: @abigail_crane, and visit her blog at www.abigailcrane.com. She may also be reached at adcrane@olatheschools.org.

Utilizing Imitation to Jumpstart Creation in Writing

Aleisha Christner

One of the things that I find difficult to effectively teach is composition. Writing has always come naturally to me, so breaking down the hows and whys of the process to students doesn't. I found myself getting frustrated while teaching students composition because I wasn't sure how to show them what I wanted them to do without doing it for them. One thing I've realized is this: writing is *hard*. It's not something that always comes naturally, and it tends to require a certain struggle. I wanted to encourage my students to be okay with this struggle and to enjoy it; to enjoy the feeling of finally getting the "just right" words in the perfect order to expertly convey their thoughts and ideas. That is where the joy of writing comes from, and I wanted that experience for my students.

While I was wrestling with these struggles, I began to think about how we were going to resolve them. And I realized: *I could spend the entire year teaching composition.* There is so much to explore with students about writing! Unfortunately, I can't spend the whole school year exploring composition. Furthermore, the time I did have didn't even seem to be enough. I tried combatting this time crunch by implementing mini lessons on writing in my classroom. I really wanted my students to take risks in their writing and try some new things. To do this, I started using imitation. Harry Noden explains this method expertly in his text *Image Grammar*. This text is especially useful when looking for ways to teach composition that will engage students, allow them to be creative, and really instruct students on the art of writing.

Teaching imitation can be risky because some students have a hard time telling the difference between imitating an author and plagiarism. According to Noden, "imitation emulates the techniques that produced the artwork; plagiarism attempts to duplicate the entire artwork" (Noden 79). This is the fine line we have to teach our students before we allow them to start imitating. We have to explicitly teach *how* to imitate, as imitation is "only effective if students are shown 'how' to re-create the technique being imitated" (Noden 81). Imitation in itself focuses heavily on structure rather than the content. This allows students to practice different writing methods and styles that they can use repeatedly to express their own views and ideas.

By imitating, a writer uses the structure of another's writing to infuse their own content into. This seems to work especially well with poetry, as a lot of students are hesitant to try writing poetry. I've used Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" as a mentor text in my classroom. Students were challenged to think of a time they "still" did something and write about it using the same repetition and/or rhyme sequence as Angelou. One student used Angelou's structure and the repetition of the last line to express his own struggle with society:

You may call me out and call me names
You may paint my car
With disgusting words
But still I rise
People ask me why
I say I don't know
People say it's a choice
But how would they know?
Just like the grass in the spring
And snow in the winter
As sure as a child's joy and a bride's smile

Still I rise
You may beat me senseless and crack my bones
Shout my name and burn my crosses
But unlike a straight man's wishes
Still I rise
Death may grab me by the throat
Throw me into a wall and crush my bones
But love is love
So still I rise

Another student chose to imitate more of the rhyme scheme to express her perseverance throughout the day:

People put me down and shame me
And like to be so vile
My peers assault me with their words
But still, I always smile
Do their words upset me?
Well of course; they're hostile
But I walk away filled with glee
Because still, I always smile
Just like we are in a movie
We walk in single file
But I walk a little more groovy
Because still, I always smile
Was their goal to make me cry?
To make me go away awhile?
Well there is no tear in my eye
Because still, I always smile
They can try with all their might
But it won't be worth their while
Because I'm always bright and light
And still will always smile

Imitation can be a powerful tool for technique, but it can also become a powerful tool for expression. I continually tell my writers, "Writing is about expressing your thoughts and opinions—and finding a powerful way to do it." One way that I model that for them is by sharing a piece I wrote for a college class. I show them an excerpt of then-Senator Barrack Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address, during which he speaks of the idealism and eminence of America:

> That is the true genius of America, a faith in the simple dreams of its people, the insistence on small miracles. That we can tuck in our children at night and know they are fed and clothed and safe from harm. That we can say what we think, write what we think, without hearing a sudden knock on the door. That we can have an idea and start our own business without paying a bribe or hiring somebody's son. That we can participate in the political process without fear of retribution, and that our votes will he counted—at least, most of the time. (Obama)

I then share my imitation that I wrote at a time when I was frustrated with the system of education:

> "That is the true genius of educational legislation, a system of flaws; a complete dependence upon governing bodies, that we can stop paying teachers and know that our students will still get taught. That we can cut the budget, cut out art programs, without too much complaint from the masses. That we can regulate and standardize curriculum, without any checks or balances; that we can expect students to learn and grow without an actual plan or any funds to support them. And that our kids might just become productive members of society—at least most of the time."

We then discuss how someone else's structure can be a powerful platform for our own thoughts and I challenge my students to find their own platform for creation. One student chose to model the structure of Obama's address to express his view on and experience with the foster care system:

> "That is the true genius of foster care, a system so broken people forget to care. That children can grow up experiencing abuse and neglect. That these children forget what love feels like; they don't remember any hugs or kisses. That we rent children out for a hundred bucks a pop, and then don't care where they end up. That when they grow up and steal from a grocery store, we wonder why and what happened to them. That we can send them to jail without any glance into their past, and that they are lost, forgotten, and discarded—or at least, most of them."

Imitation can seem like an ineffective method at first glance. However, it's a great method to give students tools to put in their writing toolbox. Research done at the University of Miami found that students who had imitated professional sentence structures "wrote papers that were graded higher than those written by students who had not" (Daiker, Kerek, Morenburg 4). This research indicates that imitation is key in growing and improving as a writer.

Another aspect in becoming a better writer is reading. Findings from Stephen Krashen's book *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research* shows that extensive readers show improvement in writing as well as in reading and "have a more mature writing style" (Krashen 8). This occurs because avid readers are consistently exposed to writing—specifically higher quality writing—than non-readers. To harness this in the classroom, Krashen suggests using "free voluntary reading," in which students "read because [they] want to: no book reports, no questions at the end of the chapter" (Krashen 1). This will "provide a foundation so that higher levels of proficiency may be reached" (Krashen 1). Another author, Ruth Culham, in her book *The Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing*, backs up the reading and writing connection by explaining, "a deep thoughtful understanding of how text works creates an understanding of what good writers do, and in turn provides options for them as they write" (Culham 34). The more texts we expose our students to, the better writers they will become.

When we encourage students to read for pleasure, we can lead them to becoming better readers and writers. When we hook students with literature that they enjoy, they are learning from established writers. We can supplement this by using imitation in our classrooms. Encourage your writers to choose their own passages to imitate—passages that mean something to them. This will lead them to creating compositions that are meaningful. In addition, encouraging students to play with an already established structure allows them to take more risk with their writing and gives them the confidence to begin creating their own structure within their compositions.

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The Tree of Panic in *A Separate Peace*

Judy Sansom

Abstract
With the growth in popularity of young adult (YA) literature over the past few decades, novels such as John Knowles's 1959 classic *A Separate Peace* deserve to be analyzed for typical YA themes, such as sexuality, identity, dysfunctional family units, and coming of age motifs. This paper evaluates *A Separate Peace* from a queer theory perspective while analyzing symbolic elements and themes. By examining these YA themes, teachers can offer fresh perspectives while teaching classic novels that have withstood the test of time.

Keywords
Knowles; *A Separate Peace*; queer literature, YAL; young adult; symbolism; World War II; biblical; tree of knowledge; homosexual panic; guilt; Genesis; coming of age.

John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* takes place in 1942 at the Devon boarding school for boys in New England where World War II serves as a significant backdrop. The narrative follows two close friends, Phineas (called Finny) and Gene, who share a life-changing summer together. A tree serves as a crucial part of the story because it provides a setting, centralizes conflicts, and serves as a symbol on multiple levels. When the reader is first introduced to the tree, it is described as ". . . tremendous, an irate, steely black steeple beside the river . . . Its soaring black trunk was set with rough wooden pegs leading up to a substantial limb which extended farther toward the water" (Knowles 14-15). The tree symbolizes the boys' rebellion against the strict school rules and the biblical tree of knowledge, and serves as a phallic symbol representing the homosexual relationship between Finny and Gene that is forbidden by society.

Despite the rumor that "the seventeen-year-old-bunch" jumps from the large limb into the river below, climbing the tree and jumping into the water directly violates school policy (Knowles 14). Knowing jumping is forbidden attracts Finny to jump from the tree. Finny successfully makes the jump and immediately begins pressuring Gene to make the leap. Both boys complete the jump uninjured, so the boys attempt to convince other classmen to jump, but they refuse.

The following night Finny and Gene decide to jump from the tree again. This time they choose to give their antics a title—"The Super Suicide Society of Summer Session" (Knowles 31). Soon, other classmen are initiated into the group. After many nights of having Suicide Society meetings, Gene becomes unable to focus on his studies. In his frustration, Gene decides Finny is purposely hindering his focus so he will not receive better grades than Finny. For weeks, Gene allows these ideas to fester inside his head. One day while heading to the tree, he confronts Finny about his assumptions. Finny's response is so innocent that Gene immediately knows he has been wrong about Finny's intentions; however, in a strange lapse of judgement, Gene "jounced the limb" causing Finny to fall with a "sickening, unnatural thud" (Knowles 60). This fall results in Finny breaking his leg, which ends Finny's athletic career. Events unfold throughout the book until eventually the fall leads to Finny's death.

Though there are opposing viewpoints of what the tree actually symbolizes, clearly the story centers around the tree. James Ellis argues the tree represents ". . . the Biblical tree of knowledge . . . [and] . . . is the means in which Gene will renounce the Eden-like summer peace of Devon . . . [which represents] . . . the fall from innocence and at the same time prepares himself for the second world war" (Ellis 313-14). Although Ellis offers a convincing argument that the tree represents the biblical tree of knowledge, saying Gene is attempting to end the Eden-like summer to prepare for

the war would be a stretch. The seniors *are* required to jump from the tree as a form of training to become soldiers; however, only Finny mentions the connection to jumping as a way of preparing for paratrooper training. Gene has not mentioned much about the war. Each mention of the war has come from Finny; therefore, there is no evidence to support the claim that Gene is preparing for the war or is unhappy in the safe surroundings of the school.

In both situations, Devon school and Eden, rules forbid them from going near the tree. At Devon, the headmaster has set clear rules forbidding the climbing of and jumping from the tree. In Eden, God stated they must not partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Of course, Adam and Eve both partake of the tree, causing the fall of man which symbolically parallels directly with the physical fall of Finny. In Genesis when Adam is instructed to stay away from the tree, he is told if they partake of the tree they will die. When Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, they do not immediately die; however, they are banished from the Garden of Eden and thus no longer allowed to eat from the tree of life which is their source of longevity. This results in their now inevitable death. Again, Adam and Eve's fall parallels directly with the fall of Finny. The fall from the tree did not kill Finny, yet it resulted in his death months later.

As further punishment for eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve were separated from the presence of God which correlates with the tree causing both a physical and emotional divide between Finny and Gene. Prior to the fall, Gene becomes emotionally bitter that he cannot find time to study as a result of the Suicide Society. This rift in their friendship would not have occurred without the temptation of the forbidden tree. Once Adam and Eve are separated from God's presence, they cling to each other for comfort. This is similar to the relationship of Finny and Gene. Out of both guilt and personal feelings, Gene becomes closer to Finny. In many ways, Finny's fall has created a stronger emotional connection between Finny and Gene.

Comparing the tree in *A Separate Peace* to the biblical tree of knowledge leads directly to comparing Finny and Gene to Adam and Eve. In this comparison, since Finny was the first to jump from the tree and the source of tempting Gene to jump, it would stand to reason that Finny would be more comparative to Eve, who was the first to partake of the forbidden fruit. There is ample evidence to argue from a queer theory perspective that Gene and Finny are homosexual and unable to express their true feelings. The most crucial piece of evidence for this interpretation appears relatively early within the narrative. In chapter two, Finny and Gene are getting ready to attend the Headmaster's Tea. Finny puts on a shirt and Gene looks at the shirt and exclaims "Pink! It makes you look like a *fairy!"* (Knowles 24). Finny dismisses the comment for a moment then simply responds, "I wonder what would happen if I looked like a fairy to everyone" (Knowles 25). This appears to be a clear indication that Finny has considered what other people would think if they realized he was homosexual; on the other hand, it also appears Gene has given some thought to the consequences of being perceived homosexual, and clearly fears the backlash of others. Although they are in a homosocial environment where they are "expected to study, play, work, and fight together . . . they are absolutely forbidden to engage in sexual relations with each other. Thus, the flip side of male homosocial bonding is homophobia" (McGavran 69). Homosocial environments such as Devon school enforce strong rules banning sexual relationships between classmates. As a result, fear develops surrounding such relationships; therefore, homophobia or homosexual panic manifests from these fears.

Eric L. Tribunella observes ". . . Gene jounces the limb and sends Finny crashing to the ground in a violent moment of homosexual panic" (Tribunella 91). There is unmistakable evidence for this in Gene's realization that Finny truly cared for him and was not trying to sabotage his grades. In the moments leading up the jouncing of the limb, Finny and Gene are both naked, standing on the tree limb, and Finny attempts to take Gene's hand so they can jump together. In this moment, Gene, realizing there are witnesses at the base of the tree, goes into a homosexual panic

that causes him to assert his masculinity, thus causing Finny to fall from the tree. Living in a world that naturalizes heterosexuality has caused Gene to fear he will be perceived as homosexual if he does not guard himself by asserting his masculinity.

Taking into consideration the evidence that Finny and Gene have homosexual desires, the tree could be symbolic beyond the reference to Eden. In Edith Wharton's 1911 novella *Ethan Frome,* the tree is widely believed to be a phallic symbol representing the forbidden desires shared between Zeena and Ethan. The same symbolic use can be applied to the tree in *A Separate Peace.* Each time Finny and Gene climb the tree, they strip down naked. The first time the boys jump from the tree they get dressed afterwards and head toward the dining hall, but they decide to skip dinner. Instead, they wrestle in the grass: "I [Gene] threw my hip against his, catching him by surprise, and he was instantly down, definitely pleased. When I jumped on top of him, my knees on his chest, he couldn't ask for anything better…and when we were sure we were too late for dinner, we broke it off" (Knowles 19). This scene demonstrates a sexual playfulness between Gene and Finny. The fact they have "...missed nine meals in the last two weeks" indicates Finny and Gene are constantly carving out *a separate piece* (as in a segment) of time to be alone (Knowles 22). Skipping meal times ensures they will have uninterrupted time, since the other boys will be in the dining hall.

The significance of the tree is clearly evident throughout John Knowles's *A Separate Peace,* serving as the main setting and symbolizing either the biblical tree of knowledge or functioning as a phallic symbol representing Gene and Finny's homosexuality that is forbidden by society. The story is told from the viewpoint of Gene, who is looking back on the events from fifteen years earlier when he attended Devon school alongside Finny. Gene states, "Looking back now across fifteen years, I could see with great clarity the fear I had lived in" (Knowles 10). This passage serves as further evidence that Gene may have jounced Finny from the limb in a moment of fear or homosexual panic. In the conclusion of the book, Gene describes the bond he had with Finny by saying, ". . . he was, however, present in every moment of everyday . . . During the time I was with him, Phineas created an atmosphere in which I continued to live . . . He possessed an extra vigor, a heightened confidence in himself, a serene capacity for affection . . . harmonious and natural unity … My fury was gone . . . Phineas has absorbed it and taken it with him, and I was rid of it forever" (Knowles 202-203). This description appears to be a testimony by Gene that he now accepts himself. He no longer fears the reaction of others because he now lives with confidence, "Phineas-filled" (Knowles 204).

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Beyond this Night:
A poem from the last class before student teaching

Vicki Sherbert

How do I encourage you
for what lies
beyond this moment,
beyond this class,
beyond this night?

I hope all you have learned
this semester
has flicked a spark at the
loosely gathered kindling
of all you've considered about
literacy and
learning and
learners.
You have questions that need to
simmer,
to soak,
to be mulled over.
You seek
the inspiration
to motivate and
the voice to advocate –
for your learners,
for literacy,
for yourselves.

As I read with you
and wrote with you and
modeled what I hoped would
become engaging practice in
your own literacy classrooms,
I wanted you to accept that
learning may be messy and
teaching may be hard, yet
every class, every day, is a
fresh start.

But now, it has come.
My last night to
write with you.
You are committed, compassionate educators.
Perhaps still pre-service,
but educators the same.

One of you spoke about "enough."
I say to you:
Yes. You are enough. You are
more than enough!
You will continue
to *learn*,
to *grow*,
to *change,*
to *become*
in your calling
to teach.

When all is said and
begun – never done –
as educators you
embrace opportunity.
Opportunity
to learn,
to grow,
to change,
to become
whatever your future students and
you, yourselves, are called to be.

So tonight, I write
with you
one last time.
But forever
I will write
for you
and occasionally
to you.
Beyond this moment,
beyond this class,
beyond this night,
together and apart,
we write
the stories,
the poems,
the songs of our teaching lives.

Blessings to each of us
as we journey forth
beyond this night.

Author Biography

Vicki Sherbert, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at Kansas State University. She works with secondary and middle school pre-service teachers in English, Journalism, and Speech/Theatre Education during their methods course and student teaching internship. She wrote this poem during the last night of the semester with her students. Prior to working in higher education, she taught for 28 years in public schools and has worked with elementary, middle school, and high school students. Her research interests include teacher education in language arts, place-based literacy experiences for rural learners, adolescent literacy, family literacy, and literacy experiences in military families. She can be reached at sherbev@ksu.edu.