Kansas English

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Kansas Association of Teachers of English

Sun Seeker by Jenni Bader

In this issue ...

Kansas English

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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. *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) related to teaching English.
5. **Interviews** with authors (children's, 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 (see submission guidelines for YA book reviews on the next page).
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 2022 issue of *Kansas English*: January 15, 2022

MANUSCRIPT REQUIREMENTS

- **Length:** Manuscripts should typically not exceed 15 pages, excluding references.

- **Format:** Manuscripts should be written in 12 pt. Times New Roman font and double-spaced throughout, including quotations and reference list, and composed using a recent version of Microsoft Word.

- **Style:** Manuscripts must adhere to the latest edition of APA Style. Authors must ensure that all sources in the reference list are formatted according to APA Style and that all in-text citations for quoted material from print text includes page numbers. Please note: a cover page is not necessary or desired.

- **Anonymization:** Manuscripts must be anonymized. Names of submitting authors should not appear anywhere in the manuscript. If authors cite their own published work, they must delete their names and other identifying information and place substitute words in brackets, for example [name deleted to maintain integrity of review process] or [Author 1], [Author 2]. This should occur both in the manuscript and the references list. Authors will add self-citation information back into manuscript before submitting the final draft.

- **Abstract and Keywords:** All practitioner pieces, scholarly articles, reflective essays, interviews, conversation pieces, and Kansas-specific articles must include an abstract (no more than 200 words) and a list of keywords.

Kansas English Author Guide (cont.)

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT

All manuscripts—except for reviews of young adult literature—should be submitted electronically as an attachment to the Editor of *Kansas English* at Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu. During the academic year, look for a confirmation email from the Editor within 2-3 business days. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your submission, please resubmit.

In **a single email**, authors should complete the following tasks:

1. In the **subject** line, write Kansas English Manuscript Submission.
2. In the **body** of the email, please include all of the following information:
    a. Full names of authors. If there is more than one author, indicate author order (e.g., first author, second author).
    b. Affiliation for all authors (e.g., school, university, organization)
    c. Email addresses for all authors
    d. Type of submission (e.g., practitioner piece, scholarly article, reflective essay); this informs the peer review process.
    e. Statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.
3. **Attach** the manuscript as a single attachment, ensuring that all manuscript requirements (see previous page) are met.

REVIEW PROCESS

Each manuscript receives an anonymous 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.

SUBMITTING YA BOOK REVIEWS

YA Book Review Requirements

YA book reviews should feature books published within the past five years and be 300-500 words in length. Reviews should include (1) a relevant and catchy title, (2) the book's year of publication and author, (3) textual information (e.g., character, conflict, plot, setting, theme), (4) how/why the book will appeal to middle/high school readers, (5) how the book could be included in a course curriculum, (6) possible challenges that might arise from teaching the book, and (7) a description of what you like best about the book.

Submission Process for YA Book Reviews

Email your review as a Microsoft Word document attachment to the *Kansas English* YA Book Review Editor John Franklin at jfranklin@pittstate.edu. In the subject line write: Kansas English Book Review submission. In a separate attachment, include: your name, your affiliation (school), a brief biography (no more than 150 words), and a statement that this review is original, unpublished and is not being submitted elsewhere. During the academic year, look for a confirmation email from the YA Book Review Editor within 2-3 business days. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your submission, please resubmit.

Kansas English 2021, Volume 102, Number 1

From the Editor

RECONNECT, RECHARGE, AND REACH YOUR AUDIENCE WITH KATE

July 2020

Dear Readers,

After the pandemic-related challenges of the 2020-2021 academic year, I hope you are enjoying a rejuvenating summer. The Kansas Association of Teachers of English (KATE) has opportunities to help you reconnect and recharge, including virtual book clubs and two beloved KATE events that are back in 2021:

July 20 – KATE Camp 2021
This half-day online event is FREE and features teacher-generated breakout sessions as well as a mindfulness workshop. Learn more and register today at https://www.kansasenglish.org/kate-summer-camp.html.

November 5-6 – KATE Fall Annual Conference
The in-person conference returns in 2021 and features incredible keynote speakers, including bestselling YA author Samira Ahmed and award-winning storyteller Laura Packer. Consider submitting a proposal for a breakout session by August 13. Learn more and register today at https://www.kansasenglish.org/fall-conference.html.

Samira Ahmed

Laura Packer

Reach your audience: Publication opportunities for you and your students

In addition to these energizing KATE events, consider these publication opportunities for you and your students. Check out *Voices of Kansas*, and encourage your students to submit their creative and scholarly work (deadline Jan. 31, 2022). This is a powerful opportunity for your students to write for an authentic audience and possibly get published. And **YOU** should consider submitting your work for publication on the KATE Blog (featured on KATE's award-winning website) or in *Kansas English*, which won a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Affiliate Journal of Excellence Award in 2020.

In this issue …

We have some exciting and enlightening contributions from teachers and scholars in the 2021 issue of *Kansas English*, and I am grateful for the gifts of their writing in the midst of the uncertainty and hardships caused by the global pandemic.

First, **Hannah Schoonover** discusses the importance of accurate and positive representations of disability in children's literature and highlights examples of five books that exemplify these qualities.

Next, **Deborah Eades McNemee** invites us into her writing classroom by describing her essay and story-starter practice strategies for helping students develop confidence and take risks in their composing.

Three poems by **Beth Gulley** grace this issue, encouraging us to pause, reflect on what we have learned (and taught) over the past year, and attend to the small wonders and joys that become more apparent the closer we look.

With his former English teacher **Steven Maack**, **Alex Tretbar** describes his experiences leading a poetry and fiction study group while incarcerated in Oregon, sharing teaching and learning experiences that are common across instructional settings.

Exploring timeless themes of collaboration, mob rule, and law and order, **William Sewell** advocates for the pairing of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* with a classic YA book *Downriver* by Will Hobbs and describes a variety of instructional strategies that complement this pairing.

Melissa D. Reed and **Heather C. Caswell** argue that teaching empathy is the key to creating a learning environment that promotes authenticity, and they provide instructional strategies for doing so, alongside thematically-organized lists of children's and YA books that depict empathy.

And throughout this issue are young adult (YA) book reviews from **Sharon K. Wilson**, **Lindsey Viets**, **Sydney Nesvold**, and **John Franklin**. Each book has been published within the past five years and would be a worthwhile addition to your classroom library.

Please enjoy this issue of *Kansas English*, and consider participating in the professional conversation by submitting your own work for the 2022 issue!

Until next time, happy teaching and learning!

Katherine Mason Cramer

DISABILITY REPRESENTED IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Hannah Schoonover
Kansas State University

Abstract
Children search for representations of themselves in the literature they read. However, disabilities are not always portrayed accurately or positively in children's literature. Disabilities should be included in children's literature because children will be exposed to disabilities in their lifetime, whether personally, at home, or at school. Moreover, it is imperative that children read works where disabilities are positively portrayed. Therefore, this paper describes five children's books and explains how they positively portray disabilities and some of the authors' personal experiences with disabilities. These books include *Moses Goes to a Concert* by Isaac Millman, *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload* by Jennifer Veenendall, *The Seeing Stick* by Jane Yolen, *Red: A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hill, and *We'll Paint the Octopus Red* by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen. These books bring advocacy and awareness to disabilities in a positive, child-friendly way. They do not portray disabilities as something that needs to be fixed, but rather bring appreciation to the lives the characters live.

Keywords
disability, awareness, advocacy, children's literature, representation, lifestyle

Introduction

Children love being read stories, sometimes the same stories over and over again. Whether it is obvious or not, children also look for representation of themselves in those stories and enjoy the stories even more when they can relate to the characters (Leary, 2016). However, the way children and adults with disabilities are represented in literature is misleading, if they are even represented at all. Liz Crow, an activist specializing in disability in literature, says, "Over a lifetime, you can expect at least one in ten of the children in a school year to be disabled, so that's roughly three per class. And a much larger number of the remaining children will have close involvement with a disabled person through family, friends, partners, their own children, colleagues, and so on. Clearly, it makes no sense at all to continue misinforming children about disability" (Crow, 1990).

Too often, disabilities are portrayed as something about the person that should be fixed or that the person should be angry about (Golos & Moses, 2013). Disabilities are also commonly portrayed as being solely inspirational. Alayna Leary, who identifies as a disabled writer, expresses her frustration with the publishing industry: "Even when what the disabled person is doing is normal for non-disabled people—learning to drive, going to Prom, running a company, publishing a book—it's celebrated as inspirational because a disabled person did it" (Leary, 2016). How does it affect children with disabilities when they see themselves portrayed in this way? Rather than portraying people with disabilities as solely inspirational to abled readers or as something to be fixed, authors should use disabilities in books as a way to bring advocacy, awareness, and appreciation to

the disability being portrayed (Crow, 1990). The following children's books do just that in fun, exciting, and colorful ways.

Moses Goes to a Concert **– Isaac Millman**

Moses and his classmates are excited to go on a field trip to a concert in town. Moses' teacher Mr. Samuels has two big surprises waiting for them when they reach the concert. First, he brings balloons for all his students so they can enjoy the concert! Because Moses, his classmates, and Mr. Samuels are deaf, the balloons help them to feel the music through vibrations. When the concert begins, the students notice two things about the percussionist. Her instruments are in front of the orchestra not behind as a percussionist normally would be. Plus, she is not wearing shoes! The reason is she is also deaf and feels the music through the vibrations in the floor, helping her to know when to play her instruments. The students' second surprise is getting to play all the percussionist's instruments after the concert. She tells them that they can become anything they want to be when they grow up! Moses realizes he can become a doctor, an actor, a lawyer, or a teacher. Moses decides he wants to become a percussionist.

Moses Goes to a Concert accurately portrays Moses, his classmates, and his teacher as members of the d/Deaf community. A hearing person may think it would be pointless for a deaf person to attend a concert, but *Moses Goes to a Concert* details how a deaf person can enjoy a concert. *Moses Goes to a Concert* gives specific examples of the tools Moses and his classmates use to enjoy music, such as using balloons to feel the vibrations of the orchestra and Moses going barefoot at home to feel his drum. These tools are used by real life members of the d/Deaf community and would be relatable to deaf children reading *Moses Goes to a Concert*. This book encourages the use of sign language throughout and includes accurate, colorful illustrations of how to sign the text. The book also exemplifies more subtle attributes of d/Deaf culture, such as the students waving to show their applause. The most admirable trait of *Moses Goes to a Concert* is the depiction of Moses and his friends as happy children who have typical lifestyles. The book does not focus on their disability as a problem to be fixed, as Mr. Samuels teaches them ways to thrive and enjoy activities in unique ways.

Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload **– Jennifer Veenendall**

First grade has proven to be much different for Izzy than her kindergarten teacher said it would be. It is too loud, too bright, and too colorful. When her friend talks too loudly, it hurts her ears and sometimes she cries. When a friend brushes up against her, it pops her "space bubble" and she accidentally physically lashes out. The lights are too bright and hurt her eyes, and her teacher's colorful decorations make it too hard to focus on her schoolwork. She does not know what to do, but luckily her occupational therapist and her parents know exactly what to do. Now, Izzy has her own ear plugs to help when sounds get too loud. Her teacher takes down the colorful, distracting decorations, and puts away the unorganized school supplies into storage bins. Turning off the bright fluorescent lights and using the daylight instead helps all of Izzy's classmates focus better, too. Sometimes, if none of those interventions work, she gets to go into the sensory room where she can make herself into an "Izzy taco," play steamroller with her occupational therapist, or use other coping mechanisms to help herself calm down. With these helpful interventions, Izzy decides that first grade is not so bad after all.

Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? details how confusing school can feel for a child who has a sensory processing disorder. First, it focuses on the obstacles Izzy faces that other children do not face, such as sensory overload from bright lights and loud noises. The book describes the ways these obstacles affect Izzy, and how she reacts to them. It also explains the situation from Izzy's point of view, not her teacher's or a friend's. Additionally, *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears?* focuses on the interventions she is able to use and the coping skills she learns to help herself when she feels

overwhelmed. It expresses the relief Izzy feels when she learns she is not a "mean kid," but that her body reacts to things in different ways than other children. This book could be a helpful tool for teachers, parents, and other students to understand a sensory processing disorder, helping the adults working with children like Izzy recognize a sensory processing disorder and take steps to support those children. This book could also help a teacher or parents realize that frequent misbehaviors often have an underlying cause. Classmates of a child like Izzy could better understand his or her reactions and the appropriate interventions after reading this book. A child with a sensory processing disorder may find the book helpful with explaining how or what he or she is feeling in certain situations along with providing a character with whom he or she can relate. Through the work, children also see that it is okay to work with a therapist and use coping mechanisms to help them succeed in school. Most important, through a girl main character, the work brings attention to sensory processing disorders and autism that are often overlooked or dismissed as emotions or hormones in young girls (Ratto et al., 2018).

Jennifer Veenendall is an occupational therapist with a master's degree in human development who works with students like Izzy. She works with students of all learning abilities but has a specific passion for students with sensory processing disorders. *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload* won the Foreword Book of the Year award in 2009 and was an International Book Award finalist in 2010 (AAPC Publishing, 2020).

The Seeing Stick **– Jane Yolen**

Long ago in Peking, China, lived an emperor with only one daughter, Hwei Min. Hwei Min has everything she could wish for, but she is sad. Hwei Min cannot see, for she was born blind. Her father decides that he will do anything he can to help Hwei Min see. He offers a hefty reward to anyone who can complete this task. Many physicians and magicians try to help Hwei Min, but none of them succeed. Hwei Min starts to lose hope when an old man comes to the palace. He wants to show Hwei Min his "seeing stick," in which he has carved many beautiful pictures. As the old man describes the stick to Hwei Min, she becomes excited and exclaims she wished to see the beautiful carvings on the stick. The old man explains that she can see using the stick, but her father dismisses the old man with uncertainty. However, the old man takes Hwei Min's hand and shows her how to trace the carvings with her fingers. She becomes excited, and starts tracing the guards' faces, the old man's face, and her father's face. She realizes she can imagine the carvings as she traces them with her fingers. She does not need her eyes to see, but her fingers and her imagination. She teaches other blind children that it is possible to "see" without truly seeing. She is forever grateful to the blind, old man who helped her see.

The Seeing Stick begins with Hwei Min feeling sad that she cannot see and shows her father trying to help fix her disability. However, as the book progresses it describes Hwei Min's emotional transformation as she becomes comfortable "seeing" with her fingertips. *The Seeing Stick* sends the message that Hwei Min did not need to be "fixed." However, she just needed the correct help and tools to allow her to embrace her disability. She even helps other blind children learn to use their fingers to see with the information the old, blind man shared with her. The beautiful illustrations begin in black, white, and grey until the appearance of the unnamed old man and his seeing stick. As the old man tells stories and Hwei Min learns to see with her fingertips, the illustrations gradually gain color. Jane Yolen's *The Seeing Stick* was ardently accepted by the literary community. It won the Christopher Medal, was on the New York Public Library's list of 100 Best Books of the Year in 1977, and was the International Reading Association's Classroom Choice Book in 1978. It was first published in 1977 but was re-released in 2009 (Yolen, 2019).

Red: A Crayon's Story **– Michael Hall**

Red tries very hard to fulfill the title on his label which is, well, red. His teachers ask him to draw a strawberry or join a group to draw a stoplight. They pair him with yellow to draw an orange. But no matter how hard Red tries, he always draws blue fruit and a blue light, and joins yellow to make a green orange. No matter how hard Red tries, he only colors blue. His teachers try to help him by sharpening him, loosening his label, and making him practice more. His family is disappointed that he cannot color red, but they try not to show it. Some teachers decide Red is just lazy, think he is not very bright, or say he will catch on eventually. One day, Berry approaches Red and asks if he will make a big, blue ocean for her boat. He realizes how easy it was, and he starts drawing all things blue! His teachers and his family realize he is great at drawing blue, and Red excels in school from then on.

Red: A Crayon's Story may seem like an odd choice for a book about a disability, as this book identifies the general concept of self-acceptance and does not seem to focus on a specific disability. However, while observing in a first-grade classroom, a fellow educator had a specific experience with *Red* being used to help the classmates of a child with a disability understand why that child might act or do things differently than they do. The teacher in this classroom read the book to the students while the student was in his SPED classes. She used the story of Red to explain to her young students that everyone has their strengths and talents despite the labels that may have been placed on them. The students took turns naming the strengths of their classmate, and my fellow educator describes this experience as "one of the most formative experiences to date I have had while in a classroom." This book is especially important for teachers, as it details the impact that a teacher's words can have on a student. Red just wanted to color red so he could make his teachers and family happy but became more discouraged by the labels his teachers and family placed on him like lazy, not bright, and broken. This book reminds us that affirmations should outweigh criticisms in the classroom, and that criticisms should be constructive.

Michael Hall began writing *Red: A Crayon's Story* by thinking of what puns could be related to a crayon whose label differed from his true color. The puns he came up with sounded familiar: "He's not sharp enough; He's not bright enough; He needs to press harder." Hall realized he had heard many of these things about himself when he was a child. Michael Hall is dyslexic, and he wrote *Red: A Crayon's Story* as a reflection of his own story. Adults who meant well often made things worse for Hall out of their determination to help him excel in school in the wrong ways. Hall says, "I believe that most of the damage we do to each other is the result of ignorance rather than cruelty." He also hopes "readers of all ages enjoy the antics of Red's well-meaning friends and family, who simply cannot see beyond his official label. I hope the book will provoke classroom discussions about issues like judging people based on outside appearances….and I hope Red will inspire reflection about the subtle ways children become mislabeled, judging children based on their successes rather than their failures, and the unmitigated joy of finding one's place in the world" (2015).

We'll Paint the Octopus Red **– Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen**

Emma's parents have exciting news. She is going to be a big sister! Emma is not sure what to think about the idea, but she and her father start brainstorming about all the fun things she can do with the baby once it is born. With her new sibling, Emma wants to feed her grandpa's cows, paint an octopus, fly on a plane to see Aunt Wendy, and go on an African safari! Once they are done brainstorming, she is overjoyed to have a baby brother or sister. One morning, her father wakes her up to tell her the news! She has a new baby brother. However, her brother, Isaac, is born with Down syndrome. Emma is worried that Isaac would not be able to do all the fun things she had been dreaming about. As she talks with her parents, Emma realizes that Isaac will be able to do anything

Emma has dreamed about, just with some extra help and a lot of love. When she finally meets Isaac, she tells him about all the things she plans to do with him. She tells him that she will patiently help him learn to paint the octopus, and they will paint the octopus red.

We'll Paint the Octopus Red addresses several different emotions children can feel when they find out they are going to be a big brother or sister. First, *We'll Paint the Octopus Red* focuses on the mix of emotions Emma feels when she finds out she is going to have a baby sibling. She feels jealous at first because she does not want to share her parents with the new baby. Then she feels excited because of all the fun things she will get to do as the baby gets older! Next, the book focuses on the uncertainty Emma feels when her father tells her the baby has Down syndrome. She is worried that Isaac will be unable to do all the things she planned for them to do. Next, she feels relief when she finds out Isaac will be able to do all those things, but he might need some extra time or help. Finally, Emma feels love for her little brother when she finally gets to meet him. The message of this book is important, as it displays children with Down syndrome the same as other children. Through the book we understand that they might need extra help, but they are able to live life to the fullest, just as children without Down syndrome can.

Conclusion

These books describe accurately portrayed, specific disabilities while showing them from different perspectives. Most importantly, *Moses Goes to a Concert* and *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears?* are both told from the perspective of the children with the disabilities. *Red, The Seeing Stick*, and *We'll Paint the Octopus Red* are told from an outsider's perspective, but the perspective is not one of pity but of newfound understanding. These books describe the children with disabilities as real-life children who lead normal lifestyles and feel a variety of emotions about their situations, both of which can be relatable to the children reading these books. Children with disabilities must also see themselves represented in the books they read, just as it is important for children without disabilities to be exposed to those books and gain empathy and understanding (Leary, 2016). As these books illustrate, disabilities literature should inspire advocacy, awareness, and appreciation for the rich lifestyles the disabled characters live.

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Author Biography

Hannah Schoonover is a junior at Kansas State University. She is studying Elementary Education with an emphasis in Special Education. She is also working towards an endorsement in ESL. Hannah is completing the Honors Program at K-State and is the vice president of the Iota Xi chapter of Kappa Delta Pi, an educational honors society. Over the past year, Hannah has gained valuable classroom experience working with remote students grades 1-6 at the Boys and Girls Club of Manhattan. Hannah can be contacted at hschoonover@ksu.edu.

FIXING THE BLANK PAGE FEAR: ESSAY AND STORY STARTER PRACTICE

Deborah Eades McNemee
Andover Central High School

Abstract
When her students frequently experienced fear of the blank page, this high school teacher created low-stakes practice tasks to facilitate the writing of first-draft introductions. This article details the process of the Essay and Story Starter Practice that allows students to experiment with various introduction strategies in order to move past writer's block. Additionally, the author discusses how to transition this activity to a virtual classroom setting.

Keywords:
essay introductions, low stakes writing, writing practice, creative writing in the classroom, virtual classroom, writing activities

You can't edit a blank page. I think Hemingway said it. I have seen the quote attributed to so many writers; I am not sure who said it first, but I always give credit to Hemingway when nagging my students with it. I used to repeat the sentiment *ad nauseum* and expect my class of twenty-some fifteen-year-olds to spontaneously erupt in writerly creativity due solely to recitation of those inspirational words I had so cleverly borrowed from Hemingway. The problem with the mantra is that, in isolation, it lacks fruition. I have discovered, however, that combined with a solid writing exercise, it does become useful. The key is to remove the risk students associate with writing. Once you accomplish that, the blank page disappears.

In her 2020 *Kansas English* article, "Stepping Into the Margins: The Art of Teacherless Composing," Sarah J. Donavon explains the importance of including both low- and high-stakes writing opportunities for our students. Basically, she purports that it's good to encourage students to write for writing's sake before requiring graded, high-stakes assignments. Low-stakes writing includes practice that will never be assessed for mastery, that might not make it into the final product, and that includes fun experimentation. There is no obligation to the reader, only to the experimentation of craft. High stakes come with responsibility to the reader as well as the assignment requirements. That responsibility comes with risk. When low-stakes writing doesn't exist, students understandably struggle with getting words on paper. Their brains are paralyzed. They stare at blank screens, and fear sets in that they won't do it right, that they can't. Their grade depends on hooking the reader. If they cannot hook the reader, how can they possibly write the rest of the essay? If they cannot write the essay, how will they pass the class? High stakes, indeed.

My Essay and Story Starter Practice activity allows students to jump into low-stakes writing as a way to prepare for the high-stakes writing. Creating a low-stakes atmosphere is key to the

success of this activity and, consequently, the success of the student. Practice opportunities build rapport and confidence, two elements conducive to learning. The authors of *Leaders of Their Own Learning: Transforming Schools Through Student-Engaged Assessment* address this idea, concluding that "having the opportunity to practice will help [students] see how the techniques affect their teacher's instruction and ultimately their understanding of the material" (Berger, 2014, p. 63). They go on to say that "a deeper level of student understanding, including the ability to apply knowledge to a new problem ... will only be evident by engaging students in a task" (p. 64). Rather than simply explaining that students need to hook the reader with their introductions, why not engage them in the task in a low-stakes, cooperative way?

The beauty of the Essay and Story Starter practice is that it can be a stand-alone activity or it can be part of the process that eventually results in a final draft. Students can simply practice expositions periodically so that by the time they need to compose a story or essay as an assignment, they are comfortable enough to take off on their own. Another option is to have students practice various introduction techniques in order to choose one that will best fit a specific assignment. Also, as the name suggests, with a few tweaks, this banishing of the blank page can be used as effectively for creative writing as it can for analytical writing.

To create a team-based atmosphere for learning which in turn builds classroom trust, I approach the practice as a request for assistance. I explain that many students struggle at the beginning of the writing process. Then I share that even professional writers experience those same fears. Some of them have developed tricks to get their writer brains going again. I wonder if they, the students, would help me discern which one of these tricks is most effective. It will require all students to try each approach and then simply tell me what they think. Students don't feel the pressure of performance. Instead, they want to experiment as a way of helping me find the answer. We are figuring it out together.

The Essay and Story Starter Practice exercise is a pretty simple process spread over three days. (If using it as stand-alone practice, spread it out over weeks, if you want.) Each day, students are introduced to an explanation of a writer's trick, a sample, and an opportunity to emulate it. Students share their practice and discuss metacognitive elements. What were they thinking while they were writing? How did they go about deciding on word choice, sentence structure, or content? As we wrap up the activity, I ask them what they liked and did not like about this method. The discussion creates enthusiasm for the next day's experiment.

Following is the basic script I use when we are ready to begin composing the rough draft of an essay. At this point, research and thesis statements are already complete.

The Process Script

Step 1: Introduce the Writer Trick

In his bestselling book, *The Boys in the Boat* (2013), author Daniel James Brown begins each chapter with a powerful quote. The quotes prepare the reader for either an exciting element of the story or for an underlying message. For example, chapter ten starts with this quote from George Yeoman Pocock, the man who crafted the best rowing shells in the world, including the one used by America's 1936 gold-medal Olympic rowing team: "A boat is a sensitive thing, an eight-oared shell, and if it isn't let go free, it doesn't work for you" (p. 173). The chapter goes on to explore the physical and emotional harmony necessary for a rowing team to achieve success.

(Here, we read excerpts from the chapter connected to the quote.)

Step 2: Invite Students to Practice

Let's try this one. Choose a quote from your dialectical journal that supports your thesis statement and write it at the top of your paper. Next, explain the meaning of that quote and how it

relates to the position you take in your essay. Here's the cool thing about this kind of introduction. When you reach the conclusion of your essay, you can revisit that quote again, maybe with a new perspective. You can also try a conclusion that includes a different quote and explain/analyze it in relation to your position. Wouldn't that be cool to have your conclusion planned before you even start?

(If your students do not have dialectical journals, help them find a meaningful quote in another way.)

Step 3: Encourage Peer Sharing

With a shoulder partner, share your practice. Be sure to do the following:

- Thank each other for sharing.
- Recognize at least one element in your partner's writing that works well.
- Discuss how you chose which quote to use.
- Talk through your thoughts during the writing process.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of this technique.
- One partner will share out to the class at least one take-away from your discussion.

Comments on the Process

That is it. That is the process. When we finish, I ask students to hold on to their practice because we will try a new one the next day. At the end of the three days, each student reflects on which one he/she likes best and why. At this point, most students have a rough draft of an introductory paragraph they plan to use in their essays, and they are usually surprised by the lack of tumult involved in the process.

Practicing in a low-stakes situation emboldens students to continue taking risks and helps them understand the value in practice, even if some of it never makes it into the final essay. Additionally, the prompts prod students to consider the conclusion of their essays. My experience has been that when students practice the introduction with the ending in mind, they become excited about writing the entire essay, if for no other reason than that they will get to try out the conclusion they came up with during the low-stakes practice.

This same approach can easily be used for creative writing. In fact, I have found that once we practice the short story version of this activity, students begin paying much closer attention to exposition techniques in all the stories we study. The following tables present the samples and explanations for low-stakes introduction practice for both essays and creative fiction assignments.

Table 1. Essay Introduction Strategies

Anecdote: Use a brief story that illustrates your position. Consider relating only enough of the story to intrigue the reader. Reveal the rest in the conclusion. Another possibility is to relate the story with one ending in the intro but change the story to have a better ending in the conclusion. The story can be hypothetical or real. Consider which one will help introduce and sum up your main points.	From "The Singer solution to world poverty" by Peter Singer *In the Brazilian film, Central Station, Dora is a retired schoolteacher who makes ends meet by sitting at the station writing letters for illiterate people. Suddenly, she has an opportunity to pocket $1,000. All she has to do is persuade a homeless 9-year-old boy to follow her to an address she has been given. (She is told he will be adopted by wealthy foreigners.) She delivers the boy, gets the money, spends some of it on a television set and settles down to enjoy her new acquisition. Her neighbor spoils the fun, however, by telling her that the boy was too old to be adopted--he will be killed*

	and his organs sold for transplantation.
Bold Quote: Use a bold quote from the text or any other relevant source. Explain the meaning of that quote and how it relates to the position you take in your essay. In your conclusion, revisit that quote again, maybe with a new perspective. You can also try including a different quote and explaining/analyzing it in relation to your position.	From chapter ten of *The Boys in the Boat*: *"A boat is a sensitive thing, an eight-oared shell, and if it isn't let go free, it doesn't work for you." --George Yeoman Pocock*
Rhetorical Question: Yes, you can use this method. Make sure you don't use first or second person in the question. In the conclusion, revisit the question, and provide the answer.	From "Why Women Have to Work" by Amelia Warren Tyagi *Why are today's mothers working so hard, putting in long hours at home and at the office? For the money.*
Definition: Try this strategy if there is a controversial word or one with multi-layered meanings central to your position. Yes, you can use Webster's dictionary, but it would be more impressive to provide your own definition or understanding of the word. Then explain how this word relates to your position. In the conclusion, revisit the definition. You can summarize how the word relates to your position. Another option is to finetune your working definition in light of any evidence you've presented.	From "The Loser Edit" by Colson Whitehead *If you have ever watched a reality TV show and said, 'He's going home tonight,' you know what the 'loser edit' is. I imagine it started as a matter of practicality. If you have 20 contestants, they can't all receive equal airtime. When an obscure character gets the heave-ho, the producers have to cobble together a coherent story line. Intersperse the snippets across the hour, and we can identify sins and recognizable human frailty that need to be punished… The loser edit is not just the narrative arch of a contestant about to be chopped, or voted off the island, whatever the catchphrase is. It is the plausible argument of failure.*

Table 2. Story Starter Strategies for creative writing assignments

Begin with the twist. One of the best first lines in literature is from Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. His character has awakened and found that he has somehow been turned into a bug. Try starting your story by introducing the twist or the conflict. After the initial sentence, write 2 - 3 more to explain what happened to lead up to the twist/conflict or what happens after the twist/conflict.	From *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka *As Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in bed he had been changed into a monstrous, verminous bug.*
Describe an item. Ray Bradbury used this strategy to ward off writer's block. He would choose an item and describe it in no more than 100 words, then have someone or something interact with that item to begin the action.	From "Ylla" by Ray Bradbury *They had a house of crystal pillars on the planet Mars by the edge of an empty sea, and every morning you could see Mrs. K eating the golden fruits that grew from the crystal walls, or cleaning the house with a handful of magnetic dust which, taking all dirt with it, blew away on the hot wind.*

Drop into dialogue. Many authors use this one, but Hemingway has perfected it. Pretend you are overhearing a conversation. One of the speakers just said something so intriguing that you simply can't stop listening. You must find out what in the world they are talking about. Try starting your story in the middle of a salacious conversation. Go back and forth a total of 4 times before explaining the setting, characters, or situation.	From "Snows of Kilimanjaro" by Ernest Hemingway *The marvelous thing is that it's painless," he said. "That's how you know when it starts."* *"Is it really?"* *"Absolutely. I'm awfully sorry about the odor though. That must bother you."* *"Don't! Please don't."* *"Look at them," he said. "Now is it sight or is it scent that brings them like that?"*

Virtual Learning Transition

Switching successful in-person lessons to a virtual classroom model can be tricky. Not every activity transitions well. Luckily, the transition of The Essay and Story Starter Practice comes with inherent benefits. Here's how I made the switch.

Using Google Slides, I create the same activity. The slide show consists of 3 instruction slides and enough blank slides for each student to claim one. Slide One introduces an explanation of the strategy. Slide Two provides an example. Slide Three instructs students to grab an empty slide, write his/her name at the top, and practice the technique.

Figure 1. Illustration of essay and Story Starter Slide One

Figure 2. Illustration of Essay and Story Starter Slide Two

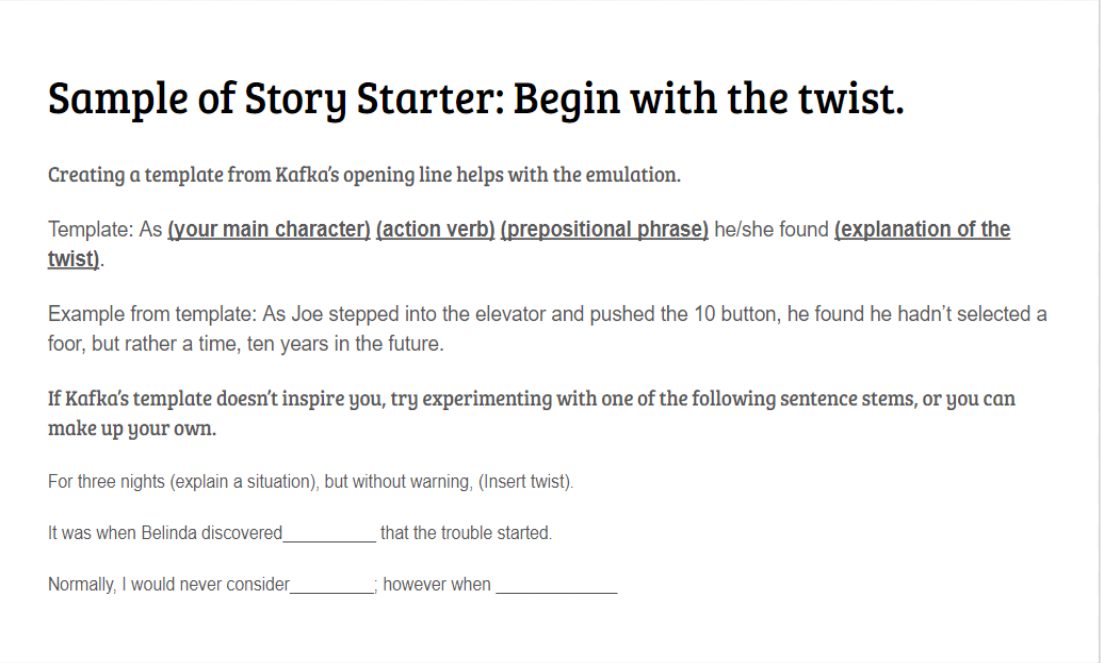


Figure 3. Illustration of Essay and Story Starter Slide Three

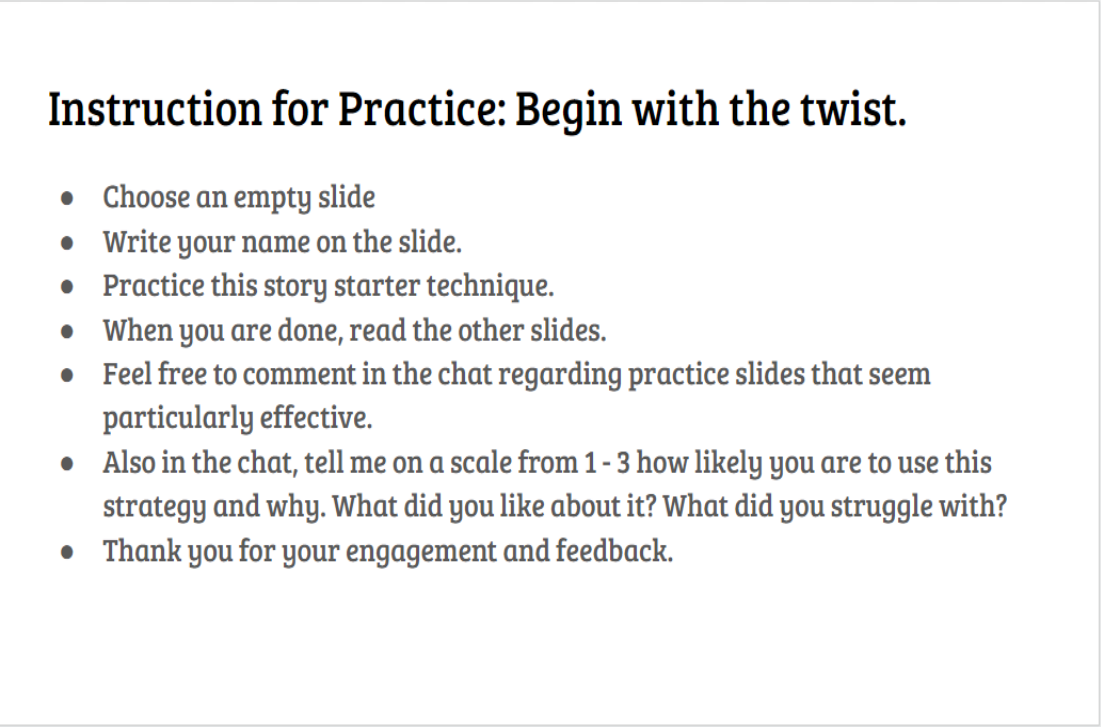
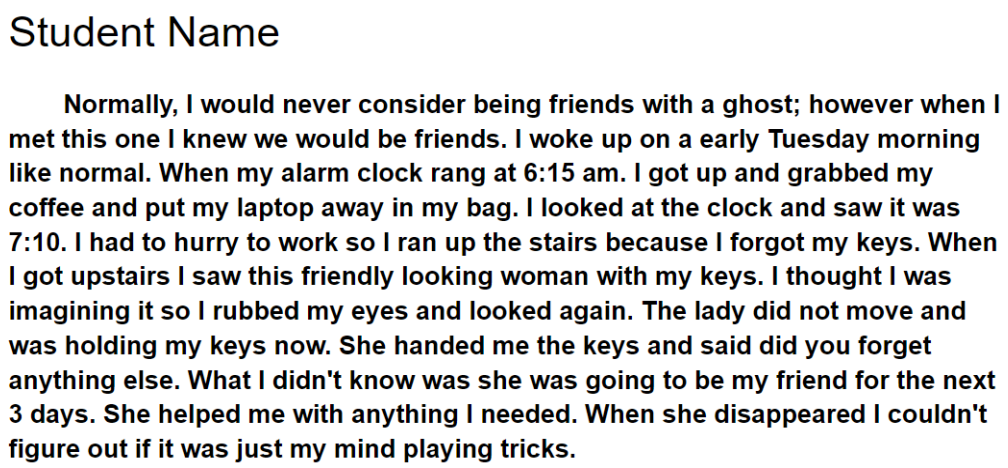


Figure 4. Illustration of Essay and Story Starter Student Sample



While students practice on the slides, I watch their progress in Google Classroom. Seeing their writing process in real time benefits me in that I can assess where students become stuck. I comment as they write, helping them remember they cannot edit a blank page. This is just practice. We are all in this task together. I can also compliment and encourage their efforts.

Immediate feedback is only one of the virtual transition benefits. Additionally, the slide show method allows students to quickly read several peers' practice rather than sharing with only one other student. Even though the activity is for practice only, many students will go back and edit their own introductions after seeing particularly effective peer samples. The chat feature of the virtual classroom allows for public praise and sharing of metacognitive observations. Posting the Google Slides assignment on Google Classroom also means that students who are absent on the day we practice can still participate almost fully. The flexibility of this activity for paper/pencil, Google Slides, or Zoom classroom makes it a great one to use for nearly every learning environment. Each type of classroom offers its own set of benefits.

Conclusion

You can't edit a blank page is one of my favorite teacher mantras. There are others. I've been known to repeat from Stephen King's *On Writing,* "Description is what makes the reader a sensory participant in the story" (2000, p. 173). I also like the one stating that writing is easy. All you have to do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed. That is another quote attributed to Hemingway with no real proof that he ever said it. A less macabre idea is Anne Lamott's "Almost all good writing begins with a terrible first effort" (1995, p. 25). None of these matter, however, without the original idea that you can't edit a blank page. This Essay and Story Starter Practice has helped my students time and again face the fear, banish the blank page, and prepare for the next step: the dreaded edit.

I'm sure Hemingway had something to say about that, too.

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Author Biography

Deborah Eades McNemee graduated from Friends University with a degree in Secondary English Education and from Wichita State University with a Master's in English. She currently teaches both on-level and Advanced Placement language arts courses at Andover Central High School. She writes about keeping classic literature relevant for teen readers at her blog Keeping Classics, and has contributed to the Twain for Teachers page of the Center for Mark Twain Studies website. Her favorite part of teaching is seeing students who profess to hate English class learn to love reading and writing. She can be reached at mcnemeed@usd385.org or at KeepingClassics.com.

YA Book Review

ART OVERCOMES A DEHUMANIZING EXPERIENCE

Sharon K. Wilson
Fort Hays State University

Punching the Air (2020) by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam is an apt metaphor for 16-year-old Amal Shahid's struggle to find his voice and survive the gentrification and racial injustice in his neighborhood, a school system that does not address his creativity, and a corrupt, racially-biased criminal justice system. In these environments he is judged by assumptions because of his race.

Amal, a gifted poet and artist, attends a prestigious fine arts school, where he can develop his talents. However, instead of finding an outlet and support for his creativity, he is victimized by pre-conceived ideas of what a good artist should be. He becomes frustrated and angry at not being seen, "she won't see me/She's never seen me . . . as if me and what I create/are two different worlds" (p. 10). Later, he reflects, "I failed the class/She failed me" (p. 133).

His anger and feelings of powerlessness overwhelm him one night when he becomes the victim of being in the wrong place at the wrong time when a fight breaks out. This event changes the trajectory of his life. Amal is victimized again by a racially biased criminal justice system. His lawyer is inept and his sentencing is unjust. He is convicted of assaulting a white boy, who is in a coma and can't substantiate Amal's innocence, so he is sent to a juvenile detention center, even though the victim's DNA was not on his skateboard.

In prison, he is subjected to dehumanizing conditions, victimization, violence from guards and other inmates, and systemic racism, which exacerbate his feelings of powerlessness. His ability to survive these conditions tests his humanity, his belief in himself, and his creativity. However, these feelings are ameliorated by his Muslim faith, the love and support of his family, especially his mother, encouraging letters from a friend, and support and protection from some other inmates who help him rediscover his talents.

The novel provides high school teachers with an opportunity for sustained inquiries into issues that affect teenagers: frustration with an educational system that does not address their needs and individuality; systemic racism; the injustice and dehumanization of the criminal justice system, and maintaining mental health in the face of overwhelming odds. The novel could be challenged on some of these issues because the violence and injustice Amal experiences from the court system, the guards, and fellow inmates is portrayed vividly and realistically.

Stylistically, the first-person, verse novel and the black and white illustrations convey the immediacy and intensity of Amal's conflicts, the themes of hope, the love of family, and the resilience of the human spirit. Ibi Zoboi, award-wining author of *American Street,* and Yusef Salaam,

reformer and member of the Exonerated Five, lyrically and poetically expose Amal's interior world and his ability to find and reaffirm his voice through poetry and art.

If teachers want to explore the journeys that portray realistic, flawed, yet resilient protagonists and their struggle to survive racial or cultural injustice, overcome the effects of a corrupt judicial system, while also expressing sensitivity to the issue of challenges from the community or elsewhere, then they could pair this novel with one or more of the following:

Elizabeth Acevedo*, The Poet X*;
Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*;
Melanie Crowder, *An Uninterrupted View of the Sky*;
Tiffany Jackson, *Monday's Not Coming* or *Let Me Hear a Rhyme*;
Jason Reynolds, *Long Way Down*;
Jason Reynolds and Branden Kiely, *All American Boys*;
Nic Stone, *Dear Martin* or *Dear Justyce*;
Angie Thomas*, On the Come Up* or *The Hate U Give*;
Renee Watson, *Piecing Me Together*;
Ibi Zoboi, *American Street*.

Author Biography

Sharon K. Wilson has been an Instructor in Fort Hays State University's English Department since 1981 and has also been Director of English Education. She has published several articles on YAL, inclusion, and diversity in journals that include *The Ethnic Studies Review: The Journal of the National Association for Ethnic Studies*, *Kansas English*, and *Salem Press*. In addition, she has presented several papers and conducted many panel presentations at national, state, and local conferences, such as The Big Read Program, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, the 49th Annual Conference on Composition and Literature, the National Association of Ethnic Studies, KATE's Annual Conference, and The Fall English Workshop at FHSU. She also co-wrote and received a grant to design, implement, and organize a YAL summer reading program for the Hays Public Library, 1989-1995. She can be reached at skwilson@fhsu.edu.

INVESTING (OR BETTING ON A POST 2020 WORLD)

Beth Gulley
Johnson County Community College

I am a consumer.
I buy coffee from Tyler
on my morning walk.
After my run,
I buy snacks
from Crystal
at the gas station.

I am an impulse buyer.
I keep the online
bookstores and thrift stores
hopping,
and I buy stamps
from the US
Postal Service.

I am a task master.
I make writing students
list fifty things
to do before they die,
then write down
the steps to make
one of these
hopes come true.
I won't let them
off the hook.

I am building something.
With the power
of my dollar
and the force
of my will,
I am making
little investments
in the future
I hope to have.

LEARNING TO PRUNE

Beth Gulley
Johnson County Community College

As pen and journal
distracted me
most of June,
grass overwhelms
my garden plot.

I did not
patiently weed
and rake it.
My plants grow
well enough.
They are
beautiful to me.

I wonder, though,
if my garden neighbors
secretly judge me,
as their corn grows
in weedless rows
and their squash flowers
in well-spaced mounds.

Just like I secretly judge
a poem that clanks
with cuttable words.

I should learn
from my garden
we are all learning
to prune our own plot.

TREES

Beth Gulley
Johnson County Community College

Back in sixth grade I learned
Trees are the Kindest Thing I Know
for Friday afternoon recitation
at Aunt Hazel's tiny Christian school
where twenty students sat in what
should have been a living room.

Little did I know what I was saying.
It just rolled like a chocolate drop
on my tongue.

Now after all the climate science
and well-being research,
I learn trees can capture carbon,
prevent erosion, cool the planet,
lower our heart rates,
reduce stress hormone production,
and improve creativity
all without lifting a finger.

I realize trees really are
the kindest things I know.

Author Biography

Beth Gulley is a Kansas City based poet who teaches writing at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas. She has a M.A. from the University of Missouri at Kansas City and a Ph.D. from the University of Kansas. She is a regular contributor to the Facebook Group 365 Poems in 365 Days. She has recently published in 105 Meadowlark Reader, Kansas Letters to a Young Poet, and The Thorny Locust. She likes to travel, trail run, and hang out with her cat, Milla. Beth Gulley (she/her) can be reached at bgulley@jccc.edu. She occasionally blogs at https://timeeasesallthings.wordpress.com/ and https://introteacher.wordpress.com/.

YA Book Review

FROM TRIBAL WAR TO COLOR WAR: A MESSAGE OF SURVIVAL AND BELONGING IN *HOW DARE THE SUN RISE*

Lindsey Viets
Webb City High School, Webb City, Missouri

Studying a memoir provides middle and secondary school English students the opportunity for reflection on reality and analysis of literary elements in the same way a novel does. The genre, then, should be accessible to students. Selected for the New York Public Library's "Top Ten Books of 2017 for Teens" and the Junior Library Guild, *How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* (2017) by Sandra Uwiringiyimana (with Abigail Pesta) is more than a memoir; it's a story about race in America from the perspective of an African immigrant who fled the 2004 Gatumba massacre in Burundi. In just one night, over 150 Congolese refugees from the Banyamulenge tribe were killed by the National Forces of Liberation of Burundi, while another 106 were left wounded. These men, women, and children were killed solely based on their ethnicity and have yet to receive the justice that they and their surviving family members deserve.

After being displaced from tribal wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, young Sandra survives this massacre. Her younger sister Deborah does not. After spending two months in a United Nations refugee camp, Sandra's family immigrates to New York. While martial conflict is averted, she realizes that she has been dropped in the middle of a different type of war: a color war. Sandra's disillusionment with the "land of opportunity" grows as she experiences the social and cultural minefield that is an American middle school. She wants to belong, but her social currency has a different currency than in Africa. Navigating microaggressions founded upon historic racial oppression, Sandra ultimately embraces her reinvented identity as an African woman of color in America.

From survivors to celebrities, Uwiringiyimana's cast of characters will appeal to students. Sandra experiences an unforeseen meteoric rise from unknown refugee to celebrity youth activist. What starts as an art exhibit in Rochester dedicated to survivor stories of the Gatumba massacre leads to domestic and international speaking engagements with high-profile activists such as Angelina Jolie and Michelle Obama. Much like her Congolese refugee community, students will likely view Sandra as an emerging celebrity or social media influencer. However, Uwiringiyimana

does not exploit this part of her journey and primarily weaves her transatlantic experiences together with details about her family. Rather than touting her accomplishments as an activist, the memoir serves as therapy for Uwiringiyimana to grieve the loss of her beloved sister Deborah, whose murder takes a massive toll on Sandra's mental health.

Flashbacks from the Gatumba massacre begin haunting Sandra in college as she struggles to find her place in a racially homogenous campus. She thought America would be a place to recover from the loss of Deborah in Gatumba; instead, she is forced to deal with her PTSD from the massacre without a strong support system. Sandra explains her frustrations in communicating with her family because Congolese culture does not promote open discussions of mental health. Sandra must develop her resilience independently throughout a period of time away from her family and friends while relying upon her Italian boyfriend and his family for emotional support. Eventually, her sister Adele's wedding provides a reconciliation with Sandra's parents with whom she once again grows close. Once they finally talk about their shared experience as survivors, Sandra and her mother form a special bond, creating space for Sandra to return to her roots while still maintaining her distinct personality.

The inevitable violence of the Gatumba massacre recounted in Uwiringiyimana's memoir must be acknowledged when introducing the book to students. In the secondary classroom, the need for a refugee story like this becomes evident when Uwiringiyimana uncovers the apathy her peers felt toward students of other nations, tongues, and skin tones. As a high-interest-low-level book, *How Dare the Sun Rise* appeals not only to non-native English speakers or reluctant readers, but also to teachers wishing to incorporate an engaging text in a thematic unit over social justice, activism, or race relations. Writing the memoir was a way for Uwiringiyimana to process her grief from all she had lost: shelter, clothing, security, family, belonging, self-esteem, and status. Thus, the book may also work well in the context of mental health, grief, or personal growth.

If using the book in a regular English core or ELA elective class is not an option, teachers may also consider using this book in an extracurricular setting such as a book discussion or book club, which is the method I currently use to share the book with students. The memoir exhibits a young woman's well-articulated perspective of race relations in America, a topic that is certainly relevant today and will remain relevant to students for years to come.

Author Biography

Lindsey Viets teaches sophomore English and reading at Webb City High School in Webb City, Missouri, and serves as the WCHS Book Club sponsor. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Education from Pittsburg State University in 2017, where she was a Presidential Honor Scholar and student abroad with the PSU Honors College. Currently, she resides in Pittsburg, Kansas, with her husband and two dogs and will continue her education with a Master of Arts in English at Pittsburg State University beginning in the Fall of 2021. She can be reached at lviets@wcr7.org.

"A PAIR OF RAGGED CLAWS": POETRY AND PEDAGOGY IN PRISON

Alex Tretbar
Deer Ridge Correctional Institution

Steven Maack
Wichita High School East

Abstract
Alex Tretbar, a Wichitan and graduate of the University of Kansas, reflects on his incarceration in Oregon and the role of literature in helping him and others who live in prison make sense of their experience. During his imprisonment, Tretbar acquired a job as a GED tutor and eventually took on a role as leader of a poetry and fiction study group. He shares experiences common to teachers of poetry both in and out of prison and demonstrates the power of poetry to help people learn about language, connect with each other, and appreciate how poetry can teach us about ourselves. Moreover, poetry and pedagogy have their own unique relevance in prison. Tretbar forms several important connections with other imprisoned men through their poetry group and explores how the power of poetry can help teachers and students confront the personal, political, and artistic issues we all face. Eventually, Tretbar's poetry group is shut down by a prison-wide COVID-19 lockdown just as its members were receiving instruction from visiting poets and educators. Steven Maack, one of Tretbar's high school English teachers, introduces Tretbar's reflection and provides an update in an afterword.

Keywords
poetry in prison, poetry study group; literary pedagogy; former student; Kansas-Oregon connection

Introduction

Most spring semesters for the last ten years, as my graduating seniors prepare to commence their new lives after high school, I (Steven) write a poem in their honor. I usually share it with them on social media so even those seniors I don't have in class can see it, and I read it to my own students on their last day of class. But the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed all the traditional rites of passage for high school seniors in the spring of 2020. As schools were closed and my students and I were ostensibly in lockdown, I looked out through the window of my house and wrote a poem that I never got to read to my seniors in person, a sonnet I called "Sunny Windows":

> The rising sun behind a naked window
> Burns a pane's shape inside your vision.
> Closed eyelids reveal a faint gold glow,

A remnant of inevitable collision
Between dreams outside, beyond the glass,
You know you want but can't quite access—
And an idle urge to watch the world pass
While newformed regrets fester without redress.
A world merely watched neither stops nor slows,
Nor waits for late passengers to jump on board.
Stay alert! Don't stare through sunny windows.
When the time is right, find territory unexplored,
Join others outside who help you keep pace,
Move out beyond windows and leave your trace.

In June 2020, a friend and fellow educator contacted me to tell me that she had shared my poem with her son, a student in my senior world literature class and graduate of 2008. She also shared with me that he is incarcerated in Oregon and would appreciate a letter from me. Thus, Alex Tretbar and I started our correspondence by mail and became reacquainted.

I'm now chagrined that my poem implies that one can easily overcome the figurative imprisonment of a pandemic lockdown by stepping out to explore the world when the lockdown is over. I cringe at how this might sound to a genuinely incarcerated person experiencing his own pandemic lockdown from within a prison cell. But I remain in awe of Alex's candor, and even sense of humor, regarding his incarceration. Alex noted the stilted tone of my first letter and informed me, outright, that there was no need to "beat around any bushes" over the fact of his living in prison: "Just know that I am far beyond (I really just bypassed it altogether) self-pity and embarrassment over my predicament… I like to think that I'm immune to the truth now." This directness reminded me of what I had appreciated about Alex in high school: his dry (or even wry) humor, his insights into language, particularly poetry, and his humble but consistent engagement in my world literature class. He was not often eager to discuss poems in class, but when he had something to say, he could show a perception that surpassed his most insightful classmates.

After we exchanged several letters and I learned that Alex was teaching and studying poetry with fellow imprisoned men, I knew Alex had a story to share. I suggested he write an account of work as an educator and student of literature in prison. He captures the experience of all educators who try to help students connect with the abstractions and beauty of poetry, but in prison, so much more is at stake than in most of our classrooms. The prison setting amplifies the importance of the human connection poetry provides and reminds us of how much is lost when we are cut off from teaching and learning poetry.

"A Pair of Ragged Claws": Poetry and Pedagogy in Prison

Instead of asking when you were arrested, people who live in prison sometimes say, "When did you fall?"

I fell in 2017. I fell in 2002. I fell in the early '80s.

There is poetry in these answers, all of which transmute the exile of imprisonment into the simple, physical act of falling down, as in a child's complaint to their mother: *I fell during recess and it hurt a lot.*

I (Alex) have always been moved by this gentle hedging—a sacrifice of specific detail for euphemism and sympathy—and I often use it to illustrate for my students[1] the ubiquity of poetry in plainspoken English. Metaphor is more than a device for bolstering works of art. It is a survival tactic unique to humans, one that allows us to dampen our terror, amplify beauty, or mine humor from sorrow. The person who lives in prison[2] readily understands this, for their language is already steeped in slang, misdirection, hyperbole, and understatement. This was the basis of my first attempt to teach poetry in prison.

I "fell" in early 2017 and pinballed through various jails and prisons before arriving at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in September 2018. It's a minimum-security prison just outside Madras, Oregon, a tiny remote town couched in the austere beauty of central Oregon's steppe lands. Juniper, sagebrush, and ponderosa pine dot the nearby crags, and the formidable Mt. Jefferson sits crowned with snow to the west.

My first move upon arrival at Deer Ridge was to apply for a GED tutor position, if only to selfishly avoid conscription into the kitchen or scullery (also harrowingly known as "the dish pit"). I was nervous about the prospect of tutoring adults; it had been six years since graduating from the University of Kansas with a BS in journalism and a BA in English literature, and ten years since high school in Wichita. But the job was among the highest-paying in the state's prison system—$77.90 per month—and I would be around books and calculators instead of bleach, onions, and endless pots and pans.

The education department hired me, and I began working one-on-one with students immediately; the only training I received was from other imprisoned men. The state of Oregon mandates that "adults in custody" (AICs) without verifiable high school diplomas attend adult basic education (ABE) or GED courses while they are incarcerated, until they parole or earn their diplomas or degrees. Student skill levels vary dramatically. There are math savants who struggle with basic reading comprehension, readers of Dostoyevsky who cannot add or subtract, and men who dropped out of school as early as second grade and must start from scratch.

While there is no universal structure for prison education programs in Oregon, the model is essentially the same across the state: imprisoned tutors (the majority of whom are themselves graduates from prison GED programs) work with imprisoned students, and each prison's program is facilitated by contracted instructors from a nearby community college (Central Oregon Community College, in the case of Deer Ridge). When a student and/or their tutor feel that they are ready to take on one of the official GED tests—there are four: math, social studies, science, and "reasoning through language arts" (RLA)—a facilitator schedules the test, the cost of which is covered by the state.

As with any school or college, classroom size and teacher-to-student ratio are the primary factors that determine the quality of education. At some prisons, one tutor will hold forth with up to thirty students, all of whom are at different points in the curriculum. We are fortunate enough at Deer Ridge to enjoy a 1:1 or 1:2 ratio, a luxury which makes possible granular attention to each student's particular needs and idiosyncrasies.

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[1] I am reluctant to call myself a "teacher" or to refer to peers as my "students" as I have no formal training in pedagogy, but I will adopt this terminology for this essay as those terms represent the clearest explanation of our relationship.

[2] I defer here to Ashley E. Lucas, associate professor of theatre and drama at the University of Michigan who uses "the terms imprisoned person, the incarcerated, and people who live in prisons… to remind readers both of the humanity of those who live in confinement and of the ever-present and domineering force of the institution itself on the lives of those inside it" (Lucas, 2020, p. 16).

What I found disheartening, though, is that poetry and fiction figure very little in the GED's RLA curriculum. Literature seemed an afterthought.

It didn't take long for me to realize that I loved teaching—everything from phonics to quadratic equations. I was still grateful not to be toiling in the kitchen or the dish pit, but I was even more grateful that my privileged college education was being put to good use.

One day during a break between students, I was experimenting with the Oulipian "s+7" writing method wherein each word of a text is replaced by the word seven words ahead of it in the dictionary— "son of Laertes in the line of Zeus" (Homer/Lombardo, n.d./2000, book X, l. 509) becomes "sonata da chiesa of Lafayette in the linear B of Zhengzhou." A fellow tutor, Bill (not his real name), leaned over my shoulder and asked, "What are you working on there?" I showed him how the s+7 worked and invited him to try it out himself on a different line from Homer's *Odyssey*. Bill, a journeyman carpenter with a passion for architecture, was fascinated by this mathematical, mechanical approach to poetry, and we spent the rest of our break discussing the happy intersections of art, science, and math.

I learned that Bill, like many people who haven't read much poetry since adolescence, had a lukewarm disposition towards the art form. It was a classic case of what Ben Lerner describes in *The Hatred of Poetry*, "The fatal problem with poetry: poems" (2016, p. 23). For Bill, poetry was inscrutable, a tangle of knotty syntax and cloying rhyme. He hadn't read poems that spoke to him.

Before meeting with my next student, I fetched a copy of *Leaves of Grass* from our humble, single shelf of poetry in the education library and pointed Bill to Whitman's sprawling catalogs of everyday Americans and their ordinary goings-about. I told him that he might see himself in there.

In April 2018, about six months before I landed at Deer Ridge and began my work as a tutor, I was at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) in Wilsonville, Oregon—the sole women's institution in the state, but also home to what amounts to a kind of Hogwartsian "sorting hat" for men on their way to prison. I had just been sentenced to 80 months (64 with good behavior) after sitting in a county jail for more than a year, and now I was to wait another 30 days at CCCF in a wing of the complex that every imprisoned male in Oregon must pass through after sentencing, while counselors and algorithms convened to determine which of the thirteen men's prisons I would be shipped to. At that time, I ended up in the desert, at the medium-security Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. I was not allowed to bring to prison any of my books or writing from jail, so I was simply a man with a bedroll, toothbrush, and razor all over again.

A poem I wrote during the time illustrates the stasis, dread, and distance of the final waiting room before prison:

> And I saw a flock of butterfly
> knives cross the ocean
> overhead, all the while
> their steel humming with the brittle
> tenor of shopworn song
>
> That was a joy ago
>
> Now my lips are inches below
> the water's surface—
> but they may as well be
> sucking at sand for

all the oxygen
they get

I try to sing
something sideways

but my vocables just bubble
& rupture into the low sky

During one of the few times per day I was allowed out of my cell, I found a crusty old poetry anthology on the meager bookshelf in the day room and brought it with me back to my bunk. That night, by the only available light of an eerie blue bulb, I read "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" for the first time since high school, and it knocked the wind out of me. Tears of affinity bubbled up. Here was a song of solitude and sadness with a significance that had bypassed my consciousness in youth. I felt consoled, heard, and I thought it funny that this time around, the song was doing the hearing.

I gently shook my head in wonder, as I do after every poem that fells me, and I looked at my hands. They resembled "a pair of ragged claws" in the bruised light.

Months later at Deer Ridge, Bill (who did not connect with Whitman as fully as I had hoped but did admit that it was unlike any poetry he had previously read) was the first person to suggest that I teach some sort of class on poetry.

I balked. Bachelor's degrees in journalism and English hardly qualified me to "teach" anything, let alone poetry. I was terrified by the prospect of standing up and delivering the kinds of lectures I had slept through or skipped altogether in high school and college (I was, at best, a mediocre student). But Bill persisted, and after a handful of impromptu one-on-one practice lessons, he pointed out that what I was doing was, in fact, teaching.

Other tutors and friends learned about our sessions, and I would send them off with various writing prompts and specific poems that I thought they might enjoy. I was feeling better about teaching what little I knew and eventually decided to pin down a time each week when all interested parties would be free to meet: Fridays at 11:45am. I set about planning my first lesson.

The structure I settled on for our meetings was simply a close reading of one poem and one short story per week (the story being a lure for guys who were more drawn to fiction). I didn't want to deliver confusing lectures on meter, critical theory, or any other areas of which I had only a dim understanding—at least not at first. Contrary to Hollywood portrayals, people who live in prisons do not sit around twiddling their thumbs, staring at the ceiling, or carving tally marks into the wall to count the days, so I felt fortunate to have five other men willing to spend their meager free time reading selections of my choosing and discussing them for an hour every Friday.

For our first meeting, I selected "Medusa" by Louise Bogan and "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" by Mark Twain. To be frank, I chose the latter primarily for its brevity and because it was included in an anthology we had a half-dozen copies of, the remnants of some long extinct and forgotten book club. Prison education programs are notoriously strapped for cash, so I did whatever I could to save on copying costs while preparing materials.

In the days leading up to our meeting, I began to fear the possibility that the men would show up unprepared, need new copies of the poem, make "dog ate my homework" type excuses, etc. And I understood then the English teacher's never-ending fear that their students just wouldn't do the damn reading.

So on a crisp Friday morning in mid-May 2019, armed only with what I could recall of Twain from high school and college, and some insights into Bogan's "Medusa" borrowed from an Ellen Bryant Voight essay (1991), I walked the short distance from my cell to the education building, noting along the way, as usual, a lone Pandora pinemoth skewered on a barb of concertina wire.

Although our first meeting was awkward at times, freighted with hesitant silences, I was heartened by the members' observations and their ability to make connections I hadn't noticed on my own. Most important, though, was that *everyone had done the reading*.

Eventually, I decided to share "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" with the men at Deer Ridge. I wasn't sure how it would play in the poetry group given the somewhat alienating erudition of the references and allusions, but I trusted my instincts and my own visceral reaction to the poem.

As had become customary, I started the meeting by reading the poem aloud, and I was struck all over again by Eliot's musical treatment of desolation. So was the class, and as a result, we spent the beginning of that meeting discussing differences between poetry on the page and poetry in the air. Some of the members admitted that, at first blush, the poem hadn't done much for them, but hearing it read aloud was more immersive. I also improvised an amateur mini-lecture on prosody, scansion, and iambic pentameter, using the infamous line of Eliot's, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws" (1963). For weeks after our session, the line was tossed around, in and out of class, as a kind of wry admission of melancholy, a sigh with a smile.

The poetry group steadily grew to nearly a dozen members (mostly fellow tutors plus the odd GED student), aged from about 25 to 65. At 30, I was the group's second-youngest member. Occasionally, in egregious and potentially disastrous disobedience of prison rules, I brought canteen-purchased candy and cookies to share with the men, both as a token of appreciation and as a bribe to encourage attendance and ensure that they would keep doing the damn reading.

Some assignments were bigger hits than others. Ron Padgett's "Wonderful Things" was received with an especially colorful discussion, while Denise Levertov's "Where is the Angel" and Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers" occasioned my pulling students' teeth to elicit conversation. But one poem in particular stands out in my memory as the most controversial and difficult to navigate as a group.

In the end we managed to agree that no poem is ever "just a poem."

As I'm sure all teachers eventually discover, a class can slip away from you: the lesson is too dry, the students are bored or excited for the weekend, a discussion veers into unexpected or uncomfortable territory. I learned this first-hand when I assigned (perhaps against my better judgment) an untitled poem from Terrance Hayes's *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* (2018). The poem, by my general estimation, is a lyrical catalog of the "side effects" of modern life in America. The group members adroitly disentangled the poem but failed to notice what I perceived as numerous allusions to President Trump. I delicately pointed to the lines in question, and within minutes the discussion had crumbled and devolved into tension and division. Members sneered, scoffed, and shook their heads, and no one was able to hold the floor for more than a few seconds. I repeatedly invoked the tired "This is just a poem" cop-out until talk calmed down and turned more generally to the overlap between art and politics. In the end we managed to agree that no poem is ever "just a poem."

Eventually, I had the good fortune to work as a writing tutor in the Writing 65 class offered at Deer Ridge by Central Oregon Community College as part of its welding certification program. The instructor for the writing class was Mike Cooper, who also teaches at Oregon State University–Cascades and is the president of the Central Oregon Writer's Guild, and through him I met the poets Irene Cooper (Mike's wife) and Laura Winberry. All three hold MFA degrees from Oregon

State University and volunteered to collaborate with our group. Mike facilitated a fruitful fiction workshop, to which six members contributed original short stories, while Irene and Laura led close readings that surpassed what I had been able to manage with my limited training. I was elated that expertise from outside Deer Ridge might help support and sustain our organically formed fellowship of poetry readers and writers. Volunteers from outside a prison can form the backbone of continuity that drives arts and education programs inside.

The efforts of Mike, Irene, and Laura instilled newfound confidence in our poetry group, and in the weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic finally put a halt to "nonessential" programs at Deer Ridge, I devised a collaborative project to pitch to the men: a 100-verse *renga*, a collaborative form of poetry wherein successive stanzas are linked by multiple poets. I delivered a sketchy lecture on *haiku*, *tanka*, and *renga*, with readings of Bashō and of Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," and then laid out my idea. Everyone eagerly agreed to contribute between five and ten verses for the project, but I also proposed that we hold an informal contest for choosing the *hokku* (the opening *haiku* of a *renga*); each member would anonymously submit as many *hokku* attempts as they wanted, and then we would put it to a vote. Later that same day, I found six hokku in the file I had designated for the submissions. Here is one of them:

> She died
> I paid the coin for her passage
> Mist trails its oar pressing

I still don't know who wrote it. The prison could no longer ignore the pandemic, and nonessential programs were canceled the following week.

At the time of this writing, Deer Ridge is currently under full lockdown in response to a widespread internal outbreak of the novel coronavirus, and we are restricted to our cells for 23 hours a day. It will likely be months or even a year before what's left of the poetry group can formally meet again. I do still communicate, via standard snail mail, with one member who lives just two cell blocks away. Looking back, it seems to me a miracle that we were ever able to meet at all. A tangle of rules and regulations prevents most similarly minded groups from ever getting off the ground.

Perhaps the existence of our poetry group was itself a kind of poetry: intense and vivid, yet fleeting, like a song from under the ocean, a pinemoth on razor wire, a pair of ragged claws.

It's important to note that, in the state of Oregon, people who live in prison are forbidden from personally leading or forming clubs or groups. Such gatherings are dubbed "unauthorized organizations" if they meet without the physical presence of an approved volunteer or prison official. Notwithstanding the handful of meetings with the volunteers from OSU–Cascades, the poetry group was essentially hiding in plain sight, operating without the blessing of security staff. Corrections officers would occasionally poke their heads into the small computer lab where we held our meetings, shake their heads at the apparent glossolalia, and resume their rounds. Perhaps the existence of our poetry group was itself a kind of poetry: intense and vivid, yet fleeting, like a song from under the ocean, a pinemoth on razor wire, a pair of ragged claws.

The institutional memory of prisons is grievously short, despite the thousands of accumulated years served by its unwitting tenants. As such, few prison arts programs have the legs to last more than a couple years. The incarcerated, if they are lucky, parole. Guards and staff turn over or retire. And time unfolds again without poetry or the space to share it, until the next time a carpenter looks over a writer's shoulder and asks, "What are you working on, there?"

Afterword

Steven Maack

Since Alex wrote this piece, the pandemic lockdown at Deer Ridge has been lifted. Oregon's generous and reasonable consideration of the danger COVID-19 presents in prisons has led to the vaccination of about 77% of Deer Ridge's population, and this keeps those who live in the prison, guards, and staff relatively safe from the novel coronavirus infection. Alex reports that all of Deer Ridge's programs and operations have returned to relative normality.

Alex has started working again, both as a tutor and as the sole librarian in the Deer Ridge education library. The lockdown prevented people from returning books that they're now returning in droves. The library has been neglected over the last year and Alex has a considerable job ahead of him to reorganize it. He approaches this task with the determination of a man with a mission (part of which is still to avoid the dish pit).

Alex can dream of a set of circumstances that might allow for the reformation of a similar poetry group, and he has not entirely lost hope. The volunteers from Oregon State would be more than willing to return, but the bureaucracy of the Oregon Department of Corrections must relent for their continued visits and help. Additionally, Alex no longer has a clear sense of who might want to be involved or how the group might reform.

I continue to be in touch with Alex, and I have already shared with my own students some of the poems and poets that Alex studied with his group, all of us, in our own way, trying to make sense of the disorientation and tragedy of this pandemic year.

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Appendix

Below is the syllabus for the Deer Ridge Correctional Institute poetry/fiction study group established and led by Alex Tretbar.

Week 1: "Medusa" by Louise Bogan; "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" by Mark Twain
Week 2: "Dream Song #14" by John Berryman; "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Week 3: Three poems by Hieu Minh Nguyen; "The Killers" by Ernest Hemingway
Week 4: "The Chorus" by Craig Morgan Teicher; "The Sculptor's Funeral" by Willa Cather
Week 5: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot
Week 6: "Directive" by Robert Frost
Week 7: "Wonderful Things" by Ron Padgett; "Bulldog" by Arthur Miller
Week 8: "The Magicians at Work" by Nicky Beer; "Along the Frontage Road" by Michael Chabon
Week 9: "Where is the Angel?" by Denise Levertov; "Zilkowski's Theorem" by Karl Iagnemma

Week 10: "Oxyana, West Virginia" by William Brewer; "Not with a Bang" by Howard Fast
Week 11: "Chicks Dig War" by Drew Gardner; "Billy Goats" by Jill McCorkle
Week 12: "Howl" (excerpt) by Allen Ginsberg; "Is My Team Ploughing" by A. E. Housman
Week 13: "Travelling Through the Dark" by William Stafford
Week 14: "Wild Geese" and "Entering the Kingdom" by Mary Oliver
Week 15: "Dream On" by James Tate
Week 16: "You've Changed, Dr. Jekyll" by Jan Richman
Week 17: "Up-Hill" by Christina Rosetti
Week 18: "Time Reversal Invariance" by David A. Pickett; "All of Us, In Prison" by Jevon Jackson (winners of the annual PEN America Prison Writing Contest)
Week 19: excerpt from *The Lichtenberg Figures* by Ben Lerner
Week 20: "Our Dust" by C. D. Wright; "It Was the Animals" by Natalie Diaz
Week 21: "The Korean Community Garden in Queens" by Sue Kwock Kim; "Daedalus, After Icarus" by Saeed Jones
Week 22: "Ghazal" by Reginald Dwayne Betts
Week 23: "The Fish" by Elizabeth Bishop
Week 24: "Altered After Too Many Years Under the Mask" by CAConrad
Week 25: "Stone" by Charles Simic
Week 26: "Janus" by Ann Beattie
Week 27: "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" by Ursula K. LeGuin; "Happy Endings" by Margaret Atwood
Week 28: "A Non-Christian on Sunday" by Amy Gerstler
Weeks 29-30: Creative Writing Workshops (Short Fiction)
Week 31: "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin
Week 32: "American Sonnet for my Past and Future Assassin" by Terrance Hayes; "The Processional" by Joanna Klink
Week 33: *Haiku* by Bashō; "In a Station of the Metro" by Ezra Pound

Author Biographies

Alex Tretbar is a librarian and GED tutor at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras, Oregon. He graduated from the University of Kansas with degrees in journalism and English and is currently at work on a book-length poem about tic-tac-toe. Alex can be reached at alex.james.tretbar@gmail.com.

Steven Maack is a National Board Certified Teacher and English department co-chair at Wichita High School East. He is a past president of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English and just completed his thirtieth year teaching in the Wichita Public Schools. He did manage to write a new poem for the senior class of 2021. Steve can be reached at steve.maack@gmail.com.

NAVIGATING LIFE'S "FUN AND GAMES": PAIRING *DOWNRIVER* WITH *LORD OF THE FLIES*

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Abstract
Since pairing the classics with young adult literature can increase reading comprehension and spark interest amongst our students, this essay explores a unit plan for connecting Will Hobbs's *Downriver* (1991) with William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Both works espouse significant and timely themes: the importance of working together; the harms of mob rule; the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization; the value of controlling one's emotions such as fears and desires; and the causes for individuals and groups waging war against each other. Additionally, the essay provides a brief summary of the novels and outlines activities for before, during, and after reading them.

Keywords
young adult literature, YAL, YA literature, classic literature, canon, canonical literature, reading engagement, reading interest, William Golding, Will Hobbs

Introduction

When I was an early-career teacher in East-Central Kansas, I learned a hard lesson about the importance of building prior knowledge when teaching Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum." I erroneously assumed that my tenth graders would be able to tackle the story's style, diction, historical context, and plot. Initially, students read the text out loud, but because they had problems with pronunciation and comprehension, I stepped in and read for them, stopping to explain words and concepts. Unfortunately, the farther we got into the text, the more their eyes glazed over; it was unclear who was suffering more: Poe's protagonist or my students.

Stover (2003) argued that in order to avoid such teaching disasters, we need to mind the numerous "gaps" occurring "between students' interests, reading abilities, levels of life experience, and the worlds of the texts they are asked to read" (p. 79). Bushman and Haas (2006) explained that these gaps occur for a variety of reasons: classics were not written for teenagers; they were not written for today's audiences; teens have not experienced the same situations as the stories' characters; and the style, syntax, and delivery are alien to young readers (pp. 175-176). Subsequently,

while some students sufficiently master literary techniques to "leap gracefully," other students "trip *hard*, and fall into that gap" (Stover, 2003, p. 77, emphasis in original).

To rectify this problem, scholars such as Kaywell (1993) promoted pairing young adult (YA) novels with classics because the more accessible YA novels can bridge gaps. Likewise, Bushman and Haas (2006) asserted that YA novels can help students "hone their thinking skills" since students enjoy and have an easier time comprehending YA books, thus providing "a common core of knowledge" for more complex reading (p. 177).

When selecting texts for pairing, teachers might opt for William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (*LOTF*), the "uber-canonical" novel that has been frequently taught in classrooms for decades (Applebee, 1990, 1992; Stotsky, Goering, & Jolliffe, 2010). Published in 1954, this classic "robinsonade" or castaway narrative depicts schoolboys, ages six to twelve, stranded on an uninhabited tropical island after their plane is shot down. *LOTF* is widely used to teach text structure, character development, and symbolism (Samuels, 1993, p.195).

Perhaps the reason that this "staple of most high school curricula" (Porteus, 2009, p.16) meshes so well with other texts is that it was conceived as a direct (and in Golding's mind, more believable) response to another text: R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1857). In this tale, the boys encounter numerous enemies from sharks to cannibals and stay united against their opponents while "having a jolly good adventure" (Presley, 2017, para. 2).

Golding, in contrast, portrayed a group of children who are their own enemy and are constantly undermined by their own physical deficiencies and moral flaws. At first, life is peaceful for the boys: they elect Ralph, a conscientious leader, to create a constructive, stable social order; they start building shelters, and they light a bonfire to alert potential rescuers. Resentful of not being elected "chief," Jack shatters the tranquility; he systematically foils Ralph's authority and entices the children to play and hunt rather than perform daily chores like maintaining the signal fire. Jack's actions push the cooperative civilization into savage anarchy: the fire rages out of control, burning one of the "litteluns" to death and destroying some of the huts; Simon and Piggy are viciously murdered; and Ralph becomes hunted by Jack's newly formed tribe. At the end of the novel, Ralph stumbles upon a naval officer who has come ashore to determine the cause of the fire. Shocked and embarrassed by the uncivilized, disheveled, and sobbing "pack of British boys," the officer turns his back on them until they can "pull themselves together" (Golding, 2001, p. 182).

Over the years, a number of scholars have demonstrated *LOTF*'s suitability for pairing with YA texts. For instance, Herz and Gallo (1996) made thematic connections to Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974), Duncan's *Killing Mr. Griffin* (1978), Peck's *Princess Ashley* (1987), Myers' *Scorpions* (1989), and Hobbs' *Downriver* (1991). Additionally, Samuels (1993) paired *LOTF* with *The Chocolate War* in order to focus on the novel's messages about control, power, order, evil, identity, and mob rule. She observed, "A unit of this kind offers a variety of different ways to look at how power is abused and leadership grabbed by unscrupulous power-hungry individuals, while offering some examples of people who dared to fight back" (p. 213). In addition to pre, during, and after-reading activities for the unit plan, Samuels noted potential *LOTF* connections with poetry, short stories, and YA novels such as Swarthout's *Bless the Beasts* & *Children* (1970) and *Downriver*.

> Both novels espouse timely themes of working together; the harms of mob rule; the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization; the value of controlling one's emotions such as fears and desires; and the causes for individuals and groups waging war against each other.

In this essay, I take up Herz, Gallo, and Samuels' suggestion to pair *LOTF* with *Downriver*. Both novels espouse timely themes of working together; the harms of mob rule; the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization; the value of controlling one's emotions such as fears and desires; and the causes for individuals and groups waging war against each other. While many of the more "universal" themes might be better suited for adults, the novels' examination of a character's struggles against self and society, are highly relevant to teenagers navigating life's "fun and games" (Golding, 2001, p. 181) and discovering themselves and their place in the world.

Downriver depicts seven teenagers attending Discovery Unlimited, an outdoor school for troubled adolescents. Feeling constrained by the program's rules, these "Hoods in the Woods" (p. 1) ditch Al, their counselor, and attempt to navigate the Colorado River without adult supervision, a permit, adequate supplies, or even a river map. Much like *LOTF*, conflict between rivaling factions emerges over group leadership. The charismatic but flawed Troy is eventually usurped by the narrator, Jessie, a young teen who is at war with herself and her parents. Early in the novel, she reflects, "I could see nothing but the frightening dark tunnel that was my future" (p. 2). Initially smitten by Troy's natural leadership and handsome eyes, Jessie gradually gains confidence in herself and her crew to navigate her fears, perilous rapids, newfound enemies, and the authorities pursuing them.

One of the reasons why I selected *Downriver* is because of my fondness for its author, who I have had the opportunity to meet: first, at the Writing Conference's literature festival in Lawrence; then, later at one of the KATE Fall Conferences in Wichita. Hobbs is an engaging speaker and uses numerous photographs he took on his many rafting trips to illustrate how he devised plot, character, and key passages. Hobbs once remarked that *Downriver* was:

> set in a place I very much wanted to share with my readers. I've rowed my own whitewater raft down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon 10 times so far, and enjoyed enormously the chance to bring it all to life on the pages of these books—the feel of moving water, the song of the canyon wren, the quiet beauty as well as the roaring, heart-pounding excitement of being there. It's a joy to write about the places you love. (as cited in Lesesne, Buckman, & Beers, 1997, p. 237)

Hobbs has profoundly affected the way I approach young adult literature in the classroom. When I read *Downriver*, scenes of climbing Storm King Peak, relaxing at the River Blue, and navigating Lava Falls come to life as a multimodal experience, a blending of the author's voice, photos, and text. Consequently, when designing lesson plans, I like to appeal to the senses the way Hobbs does. To guide teachers in implementing a unit plan pairing these two novels, the next sections will provide speaking, listening, writing, and thinking activities for before, during, and after reading.

Before Reading

Using Media to Build Background

Media can activate or create prior knowledge in addition to sparking interest; this strategy can be especially effective for our students who may not have a background in mountain climbing, river rafting, or being stranded on a deserted island. Although I generally use shorter clips to maintain students' attention spans and keep the lesson "flowing," there are three fascinating longer videos about the Colorado River that I highly recommend. The first video, "John Wesley Powell" (2013), is a thirty-minute National Geographic documentary about the first person to float the Colorado River. Another National Geographic video, "Chasing Rivers" (2014), describes the river's beauty and emerging environmental problems. Finally, television station Denver 7 (2017) produced a twenty-one-minute documentary illustrating the river's numerous benefits: generating electricity, providing water for people, crops, and livestock, and supporting a range of recreational activities.

In terms of movies, *Cast Away* would be incredibly effective for inciting interest and generating schema. In particular, teachers might show the terrifying scene where protagonist Chuck Noland (played by Tom Hanks) survives a violent plane crash and washes onto an uninhabited island. In order to illustrate the difficulty of survival, teachers might play scenes where Noland learns how to make fire and how to fish.

Role-Playing Activities

There are a range of role-playing activities that can be employed to spark interest, exercise critical thinking skills, practice group problem-solving, and set up reading of the novels. To introduce *LOTF*, teachers might employ "Stranded at Sea" games. These are an excellent means for learning survival strategies and facilitating discussion of leadership qualities necessary for surviving, a critical theme connecting the two novels. A U.S. Coast Guard version of this activity is readily available on the internet. The game asks students to rank in order of utility 15 items that would be beneficial for survival such as a case of rations and a can of shark repellent. Then, students share their rankings in small groups to generate a consensus score. Finally, students compare their scores with the official Coast Guard answers. In order to make computation simpler, Mind Tools (2015) offers a free chart that automatically tabulates results; one column indicates individual scores while another displays team scores.

Other role-playing activities could be done as writing assignments or class discussions. For instance, students could compose a journal about what they would need or want to have with them if they were a castaway. Also, the class could deliberate on what makes a good leader and then generate a list of those qualities on poster board or butcher paper to display in the classroom. Throughout the unit, the class can revisit the list to consider how characters represent or violate good leadership principles. This will be especially helpful after both books are read because students can compare and contrast how rivaling factions emerge and how subsequent conflicts are resolved.

During Reading

Literature Circles

To carry group interaction into the reading phase of the unit, teachers might divide the class into literature circles (Daniels, 1994), groups of 4-6 students who read and discuss the text with each other. Each member is assigned a particular role such as the "discussion director," who develops questions for group conversation; the "literary luminary," who selects important or intriguing passages and reads them aloud to the group; the "illustrator," who renders key moments in the passage and then shares it with the group; the "summarizer," who provides a brief overview of the assigned reading; the "vocabulary enricher," who picks, defines, and shares new or difficult words.

Ironically, I have experienced "Lord of the Flies" moments when using lit circles because students did not want to participate or had not done the required reading. My daughter has even complained about lit circles: she felt like the teacher always placed her with students who would not do the work. To overcome such problems and provide a means for evaluation, teachers should have students submit their work in writing either on paper or electronically via shared Google or Word documents, blogs, or wikis. Furthermore, students could be rotated into different groups as they read the novel so they are not "stuck" working with the same people for the duration of the unit.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are one of my favorite strategies for scaffolding reading skills because they help identify, organize, and display students' learning as we read. Additionally, they may be employed to foster discourse by having students share their findings and chronicle their conversations. Miller and Buffen (2015) stated that graphic organizers are beneficial since they

provide opportunities for finding evidence to support ideas, reflect on learning, and raise new questions; make inferences based upon dialogue or themes generated in the text; pose questions to the class based upon puzzling, startling, or intriguing evidence; form dialogue by selecting passages that incite reactions; make personal connections; and analyze across texts by contrasting or comparing evidence from previous reading activities or earlier chapters (para. 7-12). In addition to connecting new information with prior knowledge, graphic organizers reduce students' cognitive load (Wei et al., 2019, p. 628).

One of my favorite types of graphic organizers are multi-column entry journals. These are simply tables easily created on one's favorite word processing application; two or more columns and rows provide space for students to log and reflect on their learning (Herman & Wardrip, 2012, p. 50). For this unit, let us explore two graphic organizers for vocabulary development and reading response journaling.

Vocabulary Development

While *Downriver* may not be as linguistically complex as *LOTF*, there are numerous words like *cascade*, *eddy*, *writhing*, *deluge*, *mystique*, and *rogue* that may impede comprehension. *LOTF* can be especially challenging to American readers due to the many British colloquialisms expressed in the novel such as *pills*, *batty*, *nuts*, *queer*, *precentor*, *sucks to your auntie*, *wizard* or *wacco*, and *sod you*. Consequently, a four-column graphic organizer could be employed to record newly encountered words or assigned literary terms; list brief definitions; cite relevant passages and page numbers from the text; and apply the term in a complete sentence (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Four-Column Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

Term	Definition	Passage/Page #	Use in Sentence
precentor	person who helps facilitate worship; music director	"He's always throwing a faint," said Merridew. "He did in Gib; and Addis; and at matins over the precentor." p. 13	The precentor told the choir to sing "Amazing Grace."

Reading Response Journaling

Reading response journals promote active reading because they have students summarize chapters, record personal reactions, make predictions, and raise questions. Since *Downriver* contains numerous settings, graphic organizers track plot development as it flows from point to point. Students could create character-focused organizers to record internal and external conflicts as they arise; predict how they will be resolved; indicate what the conflicts say about the characters; and then note when those resolutions happen (See Figure 2). Conflict organizers may be used to chart and display the rise and fall of social order in *LOTF*. Also, organizers could manage theme analysis and assess characters' leadership qualities. Finally, another benefit of graphic organizers is that they can help students retrieve information quickly, which will be very especially helpful later in the unit when students compare and contrast the two novels.

Figure 2. Four-Column Character Organizer

Character	Internal Conflict	Prediction	Resolution
Star	Struggles with feelings of abandonment.	Will fall in love with Adam.	Lives with Jesse and her family.

After Reading

After-reading activities stimulate a deeper understanding of each novel as well as guide students through a comparison and contrast of both books. The post-reading activities outlined below are designed to foster critical inquiry with a range of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Stations

Stations (also called "Gallery Walks") are discussion-based activities that are set up around the classroom as posters on walls or handouts on desks. Students move from place to place, read the information, and discuss their observations. Later, small groups share their answers to the entire class (Francek, 2006, p. 27). I first implemented stations in my university courses because they promote active learning and give students an opportunity to get to know one another while they process their learning. Still, I wished that I had used them back when I taught high school English because they can be very effective in fostering class discussion and they provide desk-bound students an opportunity to move around.

When devising the activities for each station, I favor open-ended, critical thinking questions: why does Troy dislike Al; why does Star believe in Tarot cards and crystals; what does Crystal Rapids symbolize; what are some important foreshadows; and why does Adam not take things seriously? For *LOTF*, students could reflect on the symbolism of the officer turning his back on the kids; discuss the significance of chapter titles; consider what the novel would be like if the characters were teenagers, adults, or females; and ponder how particular emotions such as fear, desire, jealousy, hunger, and sorrow pervade the text while happy emotions—even at the end of the novel—do not. Other stations could focus on key quotations, asking students to identify the character who stated them and explain their meaning. Finally, students could address specific events in the novels, explain what went wrong, and proffer solutions for preventing or resolving conflicts. To synthesize learning, I have students write a group journal containing a list of their names to provide a record of group membership and a team reaction to what other groups wrote on the stations; reviewing other teams' responses encourages students to consider alternate perspectives.

Mock Trials

At the end of *Downriver*, Al tells the kids that they will have to face a judge who will determine what will happen to them, and this sets up an opportunity to use mock trials as a post-reading activity to highlight the importance of law and order for maintaining civilization as well as exercise persuasion, character analysis, and listening and speaking skills. At ReadWriteThink, Podolski (2010) provides a great starting point for conducting trials of literary characters, offering step-by-step instructions, terminology, and evaluation rubrics for a unit consisting of eight class sessions per fifty-minute period.

Teachers might also draw upon the many resources available at The Classroom Law Project (2019) for "how-to" instructions to teachers and students; handouts for preparing eyewitness affidavits; summons, forms for witness and exhibit analysis; and guides for preparing and cross-examining witnesses. The site also models literary applications of mock trials with a unit on Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron."

There are numerous options for mock trials for *Downriver* and *LOTF*. For instance, student district attorneys could prosecute Troy and Pug for the attempted murder of Freddy; or they could try the whole group for stealing Al's equipment and rafting without a permit. Furthermore, student defense attorneys could represent Jack and Roger who face charges for murdering Piggy; or they could try Jack and his hunters for the attempted murder of Ralph.

As the public speaking component might scare some of the shyer students, teachers might have reluctant students play jury members so while they are still role-playing, they do not have to worry about giving speeches. Mock trials also exercise critical reading and writing skills. For instance, the prosecution and defense teams gather, create, and present evidence from the novels and other resources to support their case. Also, the judge and jury have to deliberate on the evidence; they could also provide a spoken or written justification for their decisions.

Writing Activities

Instead of the traditional literary analysis essay, there are a number of fantastic post-reading writing activities that may be employed as summative assessments for *Downriver* and *LOTF*. One such activity is creating annotated maps of the river or the island. When my students do this assignment, I have groups of three or four students draw on large sheets of butcher paper with crayons and markers. The sketching process allows students an opportunity to discuss events in the novels and then compare their notes with the other groups' projects. One of the things that amazes me when doing this assignment is how the class climate shifts: some of my very boisterous classes have fallen into a kind of trance—they are so caught up in sketching and coloring their maps, they are eerily silent. Even when they discuss the maps, they tend to do so calmly and softly.

"RAFT," an acronym which stands for "Role, Audience, Format, and Topic," (DiBenedetto & Willis, 2017, p. 358) is also a perfectly suited writing assignment for both novels. In this strategy, students role-play a particular author who crafts a message to a specific audience. This strategy was introduced to me during a professional development workshop in Topeka conducted by a physical education/health teacher, and one of her examples came from a student who explained how the digestive system worked by chronicling the journey of an M&M. Overall, my students enjoy this project, but they sometimes need assistance getting started. Consequently, we will brainstorm types of writing formats such as interviews, police reports, songs, poems, letters, editorials, cartoons, and instruction manuals. I also provide examples of RAFTs from other topics. Once completed, RAFTs are shared with the rest of the class.

RAFTs in *Downriver* might include selecting Al who is writing a brochure intended for parents looking for educational opportunities for their troubled teens. In *LOTF*, students could pretend to be one of the "littluns" and write a letter home to his "mum and dad." One of the creative aspects of this activity is that it does not necessarily have to be print-based. The assignment could be achieved through a PowerPoint, Sway, Prezi, vlog, podcast, or other new media format.

Another engaging writing activity involves composing alternate endings that ask students to consider character arcs and plot development and then speculate as to what might happen next. For instance, what if the teens in *Downriver* continued on to Lake Mead? What would have happened if one of the characters died? Furthermore, what would happen if the schoolboys in *LOTF* were not rescued; would the hunters have killed Ralph? What happens to the boys once they leave the island? Students could also hypothesize more about the war—who is fighting, is it over, how bad was the planet damaged by nuclear war? Furthermore, where will the boys go? Has Britain survived? Students might also flesh out the character of the naval officer by role-playing him and writing a letter to the survivors' parents. What would the officer say occurred? On a related note, how should the boys be cared for after their experiences?

In addition to alternate endings, writing assignments could explore alternate points of view. As *Downriver* is written from Jessie's perspective, students could write a travelogue chronicling the events from another character's perspective. For instance, how does Troy feel about what transpires in the story? Is he a purely bad character, or can students find ways to make his character and struggles more complicated? Since *LOTF* is conveyed in an omniscient perspective, recontextualizing the novel from the vantage of a single character compels readers to consider more

deeply an individual character's feelings, biases, and development. For instance, what would students learn about bullying, the need for working together, and how civilization can descend into chaos if they were to tell the story (or selected scenes) from Ralph's, Jack's, or one of the littluns' point of view? Furthermore, as students compare their writings with one another, they may discover that these answers will differ due to each character's perspective.

Multimedia Projects

In addition to writing activities, there are a number of multimedia projects for encouraging a deeper analysis of the novels. For instance, students could stage a live or recorded television interview with one student playing the host and other students playing characters from the novels. Much like a *Jerry Springer*-like tabloid talk show, the program could have protagonists and antagonists face each other; in such a format, both novels' characters could interact with one another. The talk show activity also develops reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills since the host (perhaps assisted by classmates) creates thought- and emotion-provoking questions while the characters consider responses which would be true to their nature; characters could also wear costumes to make the scenario more authentic.

In the pre-reading section, we discussed using videos for introducing novels; however, rather than merely consuming media, students could make their own. Using the commercial videos as templates, students could adapt during-reading graphic organizers to make scripts. These videos also have students consider the rhetorical effect of visuals, dialogue, and soundtracks. Examples of such projects are readily available on YouTube, and one of my favorites is GCubes' (2015) stop-motion depiction of Piggy's death using LEGO sets and figures.

In addition to summary and analysis types of videos, students could create "teasers" which spark interest in the novels much like Hobbs did with his *Downriver* presentation. Finally, students could make video responses to other videos using applications like Flipgrid. For instance, they could answer Dash's video about why *LOTF* should (or should not) be read. Also, they could react to Golding's (2019) contention that the novel is actually optimistic rather than pessimistic by analyzing his argument and then providing evidence to support or disprove his assertion.

Along with video projects, I have had tremendous success with "soundtracks" which permit students to connect a reading to their favorite music. As an example, students could compile a playlist of songs that they would want to take with them while running the rapids; then, they would explain why they chose the songs and how the songs are suitable for the journey. Students could also make an ideal playlist for being "stranded on a deserted island" and explain how the songs might relate or help them cope while marooned. Finally, they could generate and explicate a playlist that sums up particular characters or themes in the novels.

Having used these soundtracks as summative activities for a number of years now for a range of reading assignments, I have discovered that students place a great deal of care and consideration in the production of their playlists because they are very passionate about music. When my first groups of students did the assignment, they actually ripped compact discs, created album covers, and wrote their analyses in the form of liner notes. Today, that work is submitted digitally, but their creations are still inventive and fun to share with the rest of the class.

Students could also complete the trading card assignment to emphasize artwork. Based on the idea of baseball cards, this activity focuses on each novels' characters by having students illustrate details such as character descriptions and mannerisms, provide memorable quotes, determine whether or not the character is static or dynamic, and explain the character's relationship with others. The trading card assignment helps them synthesize the information they collect from the novel and re-present it into their own words and images. Students have a range of options to

complete this activity such as with index cards or blank paper or with the interactive trading card creator at ReadWriteThink.

Extended Readings

While *Downriver* is a wonderful addition to the English language arts classroom, we may also take note of several other YA novels could be used as additional readings to extend learning. First, teachers might select Hobbs' *River Thunder* (1999); this sequel to *Downriver* takes Jessie and the gang back to the Colorado River where they encounter former nemesis Troy who is eager to prove that he has reformed. One intriguing way to connect the sequel to *LOTF* is by having students speculate what Jack might be like if he changed his ways.

Among the many contemporary YA novels inspired by *LOTF,* Prasad's *Damselfly* (2018) serves as a wonderful option for classroom use. Prasad modernizes Golding's tale by marooning a fencing team from an elite American boarding school on a Pacific island in order to explore how teens grapple with difficult issues such as race and class. In this pairing, students could trace changes between each text or they could examine how social issues affect themselves and their peers. Another intriguing work, Power's *Wilder Girls* (2019), proved highly prescient, having been published just prior to the COVID pandemic. Located on an idyllic island, Raxter School has devolved into a prison for its students when a mysterious disease kills their teachers and cuts them off from the rest of the world. Now after eighteen months of struggle, the survivors face food shortages plus the possibility that the disease is spreading to the remaining students.

Conclusion

Hobbs (2004) once commented, "I've always thought that novels are a great way for kids to learn content. Novels engage the emotions, and the brain remembers what the heart cares about" (2004, p. 63). Likewise, young adult novels can stimulate our students' interests and enrich their backgrounds thus providing an essential bridge to the classics. For teenagers navigating life's "fun and games" and discovering themselves and their place within society, a unit pairing Hobbs' *Downriver* with Golding's *LOTF* is a wonderful opportunity to learn the value of working together while running the perilous rapids of mob rule, lawlessness, and unbridled emotions.

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YA Book Review

THE ULTIMATE YOUNG ADULT CHRISTMAS ROMANCE: *WHAT LIGHT* BY JAY ASHER

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What Light (2016) is a young adult novel that follows Sierra and the drama that accompanies her changing life. Jay Asher creates a romantic and idyllic setting full of corny, heart-warming holiday traditions and exciting young love. If you're searching for a light-hearted and easy read during the Christmas season, look no further. I cannot imagine that anyone would challenge its presence in your classroom library, no more than they would challenge *It's A Wonderful Life* or *A Christmas Story*.

Sierra's family makes a living by raising and selling Christmas trees. They spend the majority of their year on their farm in Oregon, but they make the move to the California coast each year to sell their trees. So, Sierra lives two lives. She goes to school in Oregon and works on the farm in her free time. She has two best friends, Elizabeth and Rachel, and loves her life with them. But Sierra also loves her life in California. She loves the Christmas season and all of her family's traditions. She spends each holiday season with her best friend from California, Heather.

Everything in Sierra's life is going according to plan, that is until she learns that this year could be the last time she spends Christmas in California. Sierra's parents won't be able to keep the lot open on the coast next year. They will have to shift their business in order to keep making a living.

With this being her last year, Sierra is determined to make it memorable. She continues her traditions with Heather, but she is quickly snagged by a distraction: Caleb. He is the cute boy who frequents the tree lot. He buys trees for families who can't afford them, and that is how Sierra meets him. They are instantly drawn to each other, but Caleb has a messy past. Previous conflict with his sister has tarnished his reputation, causing loads of drama in their blooming relationship. She has to convince everyone around her, including her reluctant parents, that Caleb isn't anything like the rumors claim. Caleb and Sierra have to fight against the odds to make their relationship work, and of course, love prevails in the end.

One of the things that I like best about this novel is the main characters, Sierra and Caleb. Sierra is a confident young lady, sure of herself and what she expects out of the people around her. We learn early in the novel that she has high expectations when it comes to dating relationships, and she tends to avoid boys because they never meet these expectations. She has no problem denying

any advances made by the boys around her, especially those boys who work for the family's Christmas tree lot.

She is also extremely strong-willed. She is not one to back down from confrontation, especially when it concerns the people she loves. When a local family treats Caleb terribly in the grocery store, she is quick to jump to his rescue. She attempts to defuse the situation with civility, but when that fails, she does not hesitate to defend Caleb and putt a judgmental woman in her place.

In contrast, Caleb is much more soft-spoken and willing to accept whatever life throws at him. He is an extremely kind young man who spends all of his tip money buying Christmas trees for families who can't afford them. He personally delivers each tree, expecting nothing in return. When he encounters prickly people and families who don't show much gratitude, he brushes their attitude off without a care. I have a soft spot for Caleb and his selfless acts of holiday cheer.

The main issue I have with this book is how corny and cheesy it is. The drama and conflict are typical of stories in this genre and tend to be just as cheesy as the love-y scenes. As a hard-edged realist, I can't help but think that all of the issues in the story would never happen in real life, and if they did, then they could be easily resolved with minimal communication and drama.

However, I understand that not all books are meant to be full of deep, life-altering realizations and world-changing statements. Reading is also about pleasure and escaping the real world for a little while. *What Light* could be the perfect book for that category. If someone is reading to escape and to find enjoyment in a cute story, this book is a great option for them. They will fall in love with the characters, the setting, and the cheesy moments sprinkled throughout. The story is an easy read, perfect for hopeless romantics of all ages. It lacks any inappropriate scenes and showcases a healthy, innocent relationship that can be admired.

I appreciate everything that Jay Asher creates in his novel *What Light.* This book is a great one to recommend to those students who are looking for a light read around the holidays. They will enjoy the beautiful setting and the lively characters. Sierra and Caleb are great role models in the modern age. I imagine that it would be suitable and entertaining for those independent reading moments during class days before Christmas Break.

Author Biography

Sydney Nesvold is a Missouri native and Pitt State senior who loves reading, clouds, journaling, long drives, listening to music, dogs, and looking at the sky. After graduation, she plans to begin teaching English at a high school in the four-states region with the goal of sharing her love of language and literature with her students. She can be reached at snesvold@gus.pittstate.edu.

CREATING A LEARNING SPACE FOR AUTHENTICITY AND EMPATHY: BOOK-BY-BOOK

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Abstract
If educators want to create a learning environment that promotes authenticity, empathy must be embedded into instruction. This requires students to understand intersectionality and acknowledge discrimination, condescension or oppression—open or hidden, macro or micro—that people experience day-to-day. In this article, the authors define empathy, present a foundational ideology, and provide examples of children's and young adult literature that promotes student interaction, learning empathy skills, and awareness of intersectionality and authentic identity. Additionally, the authors discuss two common approaches to empathy, shared emotional response and perspective-taking.

Keywords
empathy, intersectionality, children's and YA literature, values, social and emotional

If educators want to create a learning environment that promotes authenticity, empathy needs to be embedded into instruction. By understanding another's feelings, we learn empathy skills to communicate cross-culturally. Teaching empathy should be grounded in an understanding of intersectionality and should acknowledge discrimination, condescension or oppression—open or hidden, macro or micro—that people experience day-to-day due to their age, ability, ethnicity, faith, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic assigned status, etc. This is a lens that enhances awareness and strengthens empathy. Teaching empathy cannot be accomplished through one lesson or unit plan. It needs to be practiced time and again in order to become an internalized response. Creating a culture of empathy is part of building a classroom culture. When educators incorporate empathy into instruction, it can have positive results. Empathy can build a positive culture that strengthens the heart of a diverse classroom. Through empathy, learners understand each other and begin to build friendships based on positive relationships of trust. Empathy and compassion are meaningful when learners know, understand, and trust themselves, as well as when they know who

they are, what they have in common with others, and what sets them apart. Researcher Brené Brown (2010) suggests …

> Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it. Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance. (p. 26)

We need to teach children to be aware of emotions and self-regulate impulses, so they are able to focus on how others feel without dismissing their own feelings or letting those feelings get in the way. Only then will empathy and compassion build true connectedness.

These skills will transfer to students' lives in their community and allow them to lead and demonstrate a caring attitude to build trust and value for humanity. This broader skill set will help them think critically about the conditions that perpetuate injustice; think creatively about what they can do, today or in the future, to change those conditions; make a realistic plan that informs their choices and inspires their personal journey, short and long-term; and pursue those goals with resolve and purpose. Educators must equip learners to be the future leaders of our communities and beyond.

Defining Empathy

Within the research literature there is no consensus to how empathy is defined. Dohrenwend (2018) writes that "empathy has been conceptualized as emotional and spontaneous, cognitive and deliberate, or some combination of the two" (p. 1754) and argues that empathy and sympathy are not interchangeable. Sympathy is the disclosure of feelings. Empathy is the process of identifying feelings. Furthermore, Dohrenwend (2018) contends that …

> . . . empathy is not "putting oneself in another's shoes." If I put my feet in your shoes, I will not understand you better. What is tight on me may be loose on you. What I consider worn you might find comfortably broken in. My feet distract me from understanding you. (p. 1755)

Decety (2015) suggests, "empathy reflects the natural ability to perceive and be sensitive to the emotional states of others, coupled with a motivation to care for their well-being" (p. 1). According to Brown (2015), empathy and sympathy are often grouped together but are very different. Empathy is a skill that can bring people together, while sympathy creates an imbalance in the power dynamic, which leads to more isolation and disconnection.

Therefore, educators must create ongoing learning experiences that allow learners to navigate emotions, hear how others navigate emotions, and consider appropriate responses to these interactions. Conversation around literature allows for a shared experience and practice in navigating these interactions with literary characters as well as hearing peers' reactions and different perspectives.

The absence of empathy and kindness in our society are clearly illustrated in the daily news headlines. Unfortunately, many learners lack social-emotional competencies and become less connected to school as they progress from elementary to middle to high school, and this lack of connection negatively affects their academic performance, behavior, and health (Blum & Libbey, 2004).

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It has the capacity to transform individual lives for the better while helping to bring about positive social change in schools and communities worldwide. Empathy is hardwired in us from birth through what is known as the mirror-neuron system, and we intuitively feel what others feel (Harding, 2019).

Foundational Understanding and Research

In the field of education, there is comfort in teaching academic content in the classroom but less comfort in dialogue about cultural competence, which is how we honor identity. This is why it is essential for educators to take time to develop and internalize a strong foundational ideology. Having a strong understanding of why educators implement instructional strategies will allow for consistent, authentic, and purposeful application. Using children's literature and young adult literature is a powerful foundation for this work. We must be aware of the construct of social identities and how these identities impact who we are and how our society identifies us. Being aware of the construct of social identity will allow us to be aware of our biases and different perspectives. This can impact our application of empathy. According to W.E.B. DuBois, intersectionality is an analytic framework which attempts to identify how interlocking systems of power impact those who are most marginalized in society (as cited in Cooper, 2016). Originally established by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to help better understand being female and Black, Collins (2016) defines intersectionality as

> … a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (p. 2)

To understand and visualize intersectionality, Romero (2018) provides a Rubik's Cube™ analogy:

> The visual of six sold colors . . . arranged in various combinations in which each face turns individually to mix up the colors, helps in conceptualizing the rotating mix of intersections. The Rubik's Cube does not capture the fluidity of systems of domination but it may be useful in visualizing multiple layers of domination and the intersections of systems of oppression. (pp. 10-11)

Developing cultural competence is also an evolving, dynamic process that takes time and occurs along a continuum (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2014) If we consider, every human has a blind spot—educators grow cultural competency by embracing their awareness of intersectionality and the privileges and oppressions that are hidden in their blind spots. According to Snow (2000), in order for one to have empathy, the individual must first have experience or understanding of the emotion experienced by the individual who is to be empathized. Literature allows educators and learners to engage in human experiences through different perspectives.

Common Approaches to Empathy

Teaching empathy must be embedded in the learning environment. This can be accomplished through modeled experiences and conversation. These models can be seen in any interaction between adults and students who are part of the learning community. Empathy can also be explicitly taught through literature, media, and lived experiences. According to The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2005), a randomized control trial supported the effectiveness of empathy curriculums such as *Kindness in the Classroom*® social emotional learning. This study found that elementary school students who,

participated in the program had higher teacher and peer ratings of prosocial behaviors (i.e., teacher ratings = perspective-taking, gratitude, perseverance, intrinsic prosocial motivation, altruism, empathy, peer acceptance, & closeness; peer ratings = takes views), and engaged in less anti-social behaviors compared to students in the control group (as cited in Schonert-Reichl et al, 2018).

Children's literature and young adult literature can allow teachers to promote a brave learning environment by interacting with the text and learning empathy skills as well as awareness of intersectionality and authentic identity. CASEL (2005) states that "instruction should support student learning through multiple modalities, including: role-plays, visual clips, discussions, games, and cooperative learning activities" (as cited in Schonert-Reichl et al, 2018). Extending the reading experience with art, music, games, role-play, and mindfulness activities allows for individual reflection, interpretation, and internalizing. These experiences can extend the work of empathy into ongoing practice and engagement. In psychology, there are currently two common approaches to empathy: shared emotional response and perspective taking.

Shared Emotional Response

When there is a balanced practice of emotional empathy, educators are able to allow space for sharing an emotional experience with another person while not letting their own emotional responses get in the way. When an educator's vicarious emotional arousal becomes too great, it can actually get in the way of being compassionate and empathizing.

Identify Emotions. A child or teen who shows empathy is able to understand and appreciate the thoughts, feelings, and experience of someone else. Children and teens may need extra help learning to recognize and respond to other people's emotions. A simple way to foster emotional literacy begins by teaching children and teens to identify their own emotions. Use emotional language with children and teens that recognizes when they are frustrated, angry, or sad. Before a child can identify and empathize with other people's feelings, they need to understand how to identify and process their own feelings. When watching TV, streaming video, or reading together, take advantage of opportunities to cultivate empathy. Discuss instances when characters are being kind and empathetic. Discuss when characters are being hurtful and mean. Recognize how characters feel and how the situations are dealt with and how they may have been handled differently.

Modeling. In addition to teaching empathy, educators must also model it. Teaching and learning in schools have strong social, emotional, and academic components (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). It is also necessary for adults to recognize and respect children's emotions. This does not mean they are given everything they want; instead try to recognize and understand how individuals feel in a given situation. Recognize and praise children and teens when they are kind or demonstrate acts of empathy. If adults make a mistake and behave rudely toward someone, acknowledge that mistake to children and teens. Educators can own up to moments that they choose to be kinder to the people around them. Acknowledging and talking about lapses in empathy when students are there to witness them makes an impression.

These competencies, in turn, should provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Perspective Taking

Educators often don't realize how much their experiences and own beliefs influence how they perceive people and situations. Slowing down to put those things aside can help focus on the other person and help tune in better to what the other person is experiencing. Skills of empathy can

be learned. There are many ways educators and learners can practice empathy. It has been posited that universal school-based efforts to promote learners' social and emotional learning (SEL) represent a promising approach to enhance children's and teen's success in school and life (Elias et al., 1997; Zins & Elias, 2006).

Teaching Point of View. Diversity, inclusion and equity are key to creating a culture of belonging. The words are often grouped together, but each have a different meaning. Diversity relates to people who may be different from each other and who do not all come from the same background. The differences may be those of age, education, gender identity, national origin, physical appearance, religion, or sexual orientation. Inclusion, while closely related, is a separate concept from diversity. Inclusion is an environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, and have equitable access to opportunities and resources. Equity means everyone receives fair treatment. There's transparency to cause and effect, and everyone knows what to expect in terms of consequences and rewards. When equity exists, people have equal access to opportunities. It sets up an advantageous environment for all learners.

Teaching Empathy through Literature

There are many ways to expose children and teens to the diversity of the world—like reading books, watching certain movies and TV shows, eating at restaurants with different cuisines, visiting museums, volunteering in communities, and attending events hosted by various religious, ethnic, or cultural groups.

The proximal goals of SEL programs are to foster the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005). Characters in a book are a good way to analyze these interactions and have a conversation around the choices to provide explicit instruction in the key skills. Sims Bishop (1990) suggests,

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (p. ix)

Schools have an important role to play in raising healthy children and teens by fostering not only their cognitive development, but also their social and emotional development.

Empathy Themes Book-by-Book

Understanding the motivations and perspectives of characters in books can be a key element in teaching empathy. Books with characters who represent social identities that are different from the reader's provide opportunities to see different perspectives. Using books to engage learners in emotions or experiences they relate to is a beneficial way to promote empathetic thinking. The following children's and young adult literature are authentic teaching tools that have the potential to support understanding of empathy through an intersectional lens. The books have been categorized to reflect the core kindness concepts in the *Kindness in the Classroom*® (1995-2001) social emotional learning curriculum which contribute to empathy. An asterisk has been placed in front of the titles that are also categorized as picture books.

Caring – showing concern for yourself and others
A List of Cages by Robin Roe
**A Sick Day for Amos McGee* by Philip C. Stead
**My Friend Maggie* by Hannah E. Harrison
Nowhere Boy by Katherine Marsh

Courage – being brave when facing new or difficult circumstances
**The Adventure of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* by Dan Santat
Bob by Wendy Mass and Rebecca Stead
How to Make Friends with the Dark by Kathleen Glasgow
I Am not your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez
Maybe He Just Likes You by Barbara Dee
Same Sun Here by Silas House
Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky by Kwame Mbalia
Wringer by Jerry Spinelli

Inclusiveness – including, inviting, and welcoming others.
#Not your Princess by Charleyboy and Leatherdale
Amal Unbound by Aisha Saeed
Before I Had the Words: On Being a Transgender Young Adult by Skylar Kergil
Black Brother, Black Brother by Jewell Parker Rhodes
Blended by Sharon M. Draper
**Can I Touch your Hair?; Poems of Race, Mistakes, and Friendship* by Charles Waters and Irene Latham
Efrén Divided by Ernesto Cisneros
El Deafo by Cece Bell
**Eyes that Kiss the Corners* by Joanna Ho
Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hung
Free Lunch by Rex Ogle
**How my Parents Learned to Eat* by Ina R. Friedman
I Am the Night Sky and Other Reflections by Muslim American Youth
**I Love my Colorful Nails* by Alicia Acosta
Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus by Dusti Bowling
**I Talk Like a River* by Jordan Scott
Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World by Ashley Herring Blake
**Jingle Dancer* by Cynthia Leitich Smith
Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish by Pablo Cartaya
**My Princess Boy* by Cheryl Kilodavis
**My Rainbow* by Trinity Neal
Planet Earth Is Blue by Nicole Panteleakos
**Red: A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall
Roll with It by Jamie Sumner
Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You: A Remix of the National Book Award-winning Stamped from the Beginning by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi
**Suki's Kimono* by Chieri Uegaki
The 57 Bus by Dashka Slater
They Called Us Enemy by George Takei
**What Color Is my Hijab* by Hudda Ibrahim
**When Aidan Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff

Integrity – acting in a way that you know to be right in all situations
**One* by Kathryn Otoshi
**The Bad Seed* by Jory John
**The Cloud Spinner* by Michael Catchpool
**The Empty Pot* by Demi
The Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill
I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This by Jacqueline Woodson

Respect – treating people, places, and things with kindness
**Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes
**The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt
The Miscalculations of Lightening Girl by Stacy McAnulty
Posted by John David Anderson

Responsibility – being reliable to do the things that are expected or required of you.
**But It's not my Fault* by Julia Cook
**Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco
Granted by John David Anderson
On My Honor by Marion Dane
Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman
**Someday* by Eileen Spinelli

Gratitude – showing appreciation or thankfulness towards others.
Crenshaw by Jan Carr
**Grateful: A Song of Giving Thanks* by John Bucchino
**Last Stop on Market Street* by Patricia Tauzer
**Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts
**We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga* by Traci Sorell

Literature allows for empathy instruction to be explored while promoting academic literacy growth and development. When engaging learners in reading books like the ones listed above, educators should consider utilizing shared emotional response and perspective taking strategies.

Beyond the School and into the Community

Ultimately, interventions are unlikely to have much practical utility or gain widespread acceptance unless they are effective under real-world conditions. Educators can prioritize empathy with small routines like taking time to share two kind things they did or writing down simple ways to be caring that they can all discuss together. Organizing volunteer opportunities and other ways to give back to the community will also teach and model empathy. Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively. Teaching empathy goes beyond recognizing emotions. It involves both cognitive and emotional response with the intent to use this response to interact with others. When educators have a strong foundational understanding of empathy and adopt an intersectional lens, learners feel compassion, understanding, and patience for people whose lives are different from their own. Educators can facilitate growth in children and teens towards being responsible citizens who make a difference in the world.

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YA Book Review

GIRL ON A QUEST: MEDIEVAL SCOTTISH LASS DECONSTRUCTS GENDER ROLES IN *THE MAD WOLF'S DAUGHTER*

John Franklin
Pittsburg State University

Motherless—though not without family—twelve-year-old Drest has been trained alongside her warband brothers by their warrior father, the Mad Wolf.

Attacked and captured in a nighttime raid, the male members of the clan are bound to be hanged at Faintree Castle to the South.

Uneasily allied with Emerick, a sixteen-year-old grievously wounded knight from among the raiders, Drest sets off on a quest to save her brothers and their "da." A handy map helps readers plot their course.

Soon the mismatched travelers are joined by a boy Drest rescues from bullies. Trig by name, he announces to his foster family—the village millers—that he is meant to serve the sword-wielding lass on a quest and joins the rescuer and her injured companion. As they travel through the Scottish countryside, the three trekkers personify different classes in medieval society; and, they encounter and illuminate other economic and social classes.

Teachers who use Foster's *How to Read Like a Professor, for Kids*, will be delighted at how easily the novel provides answers for the five parts of a quest:

1. A quester: Drest;
2. A place to go: Faintree Castle;
3. A stated reason to go: to rescue her brothers and da;
4. Challenges and trials: these are plot points that are easily found within each day; and,
5. A real reason to go: to disobey her da and create unity among former enemies.

Those who desire to engage in gender studies can take advantage of the Author's Note on Women, for Magras emphasizes Drest's inclusion within warrior society. This warrior's child handles a sword to good effect, providing an epiphany for a pair of village girls:

"Are you a girl?" one of them said.

"Aye, just like you."

"You're allowed to have a sword?"

"Aye, my brothers trained me to use it." (p. 186)

And, for those nerds (ahem, cough! cough!) who love to play with language, there is an opportunity to create middle-school-level "kennings" (a metaphor that stands for a name). On page 209, Grimbol, the Mad Wolf, calls the roll of his sons: "Wulfric the Strong, Thorkill the Ready, Gobin the Sly, Nutkin the Swift, Uwen the Wild, and Drest . . ." The ellipsis following Drest's name creates the opportunity for students to supply an appropriate epithet for the medieval Scottish warrior lass. In keeping with her character, I suggest Drest the Maiden Warrior.

I can easily imagine students removing this character-identifying strategy from literature to community, applying figurative language to themselves and to their classmates. You might even consider teaching a bit of *Beowulf*, calling the students "scops" (storytellers) and recreating Heorot, the mead hall where first Grendel—then later his mother—runs amock.

Literary and linguistic merit aside, what I like best about this novel is its concreteness. Drest has a deadline and a destination: unless she can rescue them, her father and her brothers will be hanged in six days at Faintree Castle. The author divides the novel into days with fast-paced, informatively titled chapters leading the reader within each day.

If a parent raises a challenge, then an alternate choice is Gerald Morris's excellent series of historical fiction, chronicling medieval society with titular roles such as crones, damsels, knights, pages, princesses, and squires while retelling tales of literary characters such as Parsifal. Any of his books would serve well as a replacement for Magras's 2018 novel.

Author Biography

John Franklin (BA Rice, MA Miami of Ohio, PhD Florida; certified to teach English and economics) began his career at Jones High School in Houston. During that time, he combined his love for literature with a love of travel, spending 12-week summers biking or backpacking to visit the settings of the drama, fiction and poetry he loved to teach: Scotland for *Macbeth*; London for Dickens; Canterbury for Chaucer; and the Lake District for Wordsworth. One Fourth of July he ventured further abroad, discovering himself atop the Acropolis in Athens, thinking, "Here I am at the birthplace of democracy on the birthday of the greatest democracy that has ever existed." He has spent his life since then appreciating and sharing his good fortune. John Franklin (pronoun he) is a Professor of English and Director of English Education at Pittsburg State University in Southeast Kansas where he teaches Literature for Middle and Secondary Schools. He can be reached at jfranklin@pittstate.edu.