

Kansas English

2022, Volume 103, Number 1

Kansas Association of Teachers of English



Sun Seeker by Jenni Bader

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Kansas English

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2022, Volume 103, Number 1

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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 and literacy teachers at all levels, including practitioner pieces, scholarly articles, reflective essays, interviews, book reviews, teaching tips, and creative works. *Kansas English* publishes about 75 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 and/or literacy classroom.
2. **Scholarly Articles**, including research studies and academic arguments supported by research in English and/or literacy education.
3. **Reflective Essays** about teaching English language arts and/or literacy.
4. **Creative Works** (e.g., poetry, vignettes) related to teaching English and/or literacy.
5. **Interviews** with authors (children's, YA, and adult) and experts in the field of English language arts and/or literacy.
6. **Book Reviews** of recently published English/literacy pedagogy texts.
7. **Conversation Pieces** in response to previously published work in *Kansas English*.
8. **Kansas-Specific Articles** that would be of interest to English and/or literacy teachers in Kansas.

DEADLINE for submissions for the 2023 issue of *Kansas English*: January 15, 2023

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.

KE Columns

Teaching Tips

Column Editor: Beth Gulley

Professor of English

Johnson County Community College

Overland Park, Kansas

bgulley@jccc.edu

Kansas English is looking for classroom-tested teaching tips, lessons, or activities to include in this column. We are open to ideas from all levels of language and literacy education from kindergarten to college. If you have tried something new, and it worked, then write about it and submit it. Maybe you have a lesson you use all the time, and other people ask you to share it with them. This is a chance to share it with a wider audience. If you have always wanted to write for *Kansas English*, but you haven't had the time to write a full-length article, then this column is for you. Send a 250-500-word description of a teaching activity that you have tried. We will collect the best ones and share them together in a column in the next issue of *Kansas English*. Send submissions or inquiries to Beth Gulley at bgulley@jccc.edu.

Submit teaching tips electronically as an attachment to Teaching Tips Editor Dr. Beth Gulley at bgulley@jccc.edu. During the academic year, look for a confirmation email 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 Teaching Tip 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. Brief biography (no more than 150 words) for each author
 - e. Statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.
3. **Attach** the manuscript as a **single attachment**.

YA Book Reviews

Column Editor: John Franklin

Professor of English and Director of English Education

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Young adult (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. Visit [THIS LINK](#) to view a list of YA books that have been reviewed in previous issues.

Email your review as a Microsoft Word document attachment to John Franklin at jfranklin@pittstate.edu. During the academic year, look for a confirmation email 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 YA Book Review 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. Brief biography (no more than 150 words) for each author
 - e. Statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.
3. **Attach** the manuscript as a **single attachment**.

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From the Editor

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD WITH KATE

June 2022

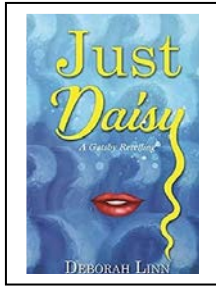
Dear Readers,

I hope your summer is off to a positive, productive, and/or relaxing start! This past year we experienced the return of in-person teaching and learning as we learned to live alongside COVID-19, including our beloved [KATE Fall Conference](#) on November 7-8, 2021. Thanks to the innovative and tireless efforts of conference co-chairs Erica Shook and Stacy Chestnut, we gathered joyfully in Wichita to learn from one another and from YA author [Samira Ahmed](#) and storyteller [Laura Packer](#). The 2021 Fall Conference theme was “Teacher as Artist: Reignite Your Creative Voice.”

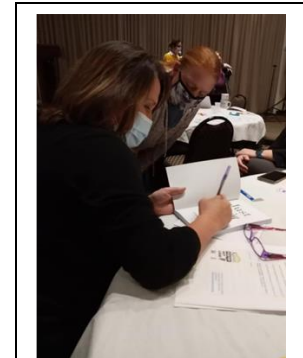


Clockwise from top left: 2021 KATE Conference co-chairs Erica Shook and Stacy Chestnut; conference attendees pose with their programs; attendees cheer “I made a mistake” during a general session activity led by Stacy Chestnut; attendees engage in artistic community-building activities during a general session. So much fun, creativity, and camaraderie!

I am delighted to publish this issue of *Kansas English*, which features a variety of pieces that will enlighten and inspire you, including pieces that highlight Kansas authors and English education scholars.



For example, James V. Jacobs reviews KATE's very own Deborah Linn's retelling of *The Great Gatsby*, *Just Daisy*, which was published in October 2021. Deborah is co-editor of the [KATE Blog](#) and a teacher in the Wichita area. You can learn about Deborah and read her blog at <https://keepingclassics.com/>, and enjoy her recent writing for *Kansas English*, including a reflective essay "[Dealing with Death in Life and Literature](#)" (2020) and a practitioner piece "[Fixing the Blank Page Fear: Essay and Story Starter Practice](#)" (2021).



Deborah Linn signs a copy of her book *Just Daisy* at the 2021 KATE Conference in Wichita.

In addition to this exciting book review, this issue also features a tribute to University of Kansas professor Dr. John "Jack" Bushman, a larger-than-life figure in English education. *Kansas English* YA Book Review Editor Dr. John Franklin spearheaded the effort to memorialize Dr. Bushman, and the special section "Good Job, Jack" features remembrances from colleagues, friends, YA authors, and former students whose words honor Dr. Bushman's life and legacy. Although I never worked with Dr. Bushman, my amazing dissertation chair and mentor Dr. Jim Blasingame was one of his proteges, and his love of YA literature and his support of young readers and writers stays with me to this day.

As the legendary YA author Chris Crutcher writes in his moving and humorous tribute to Dr. Bushman, "I think the measure of a person's value in his or her chosen career can be measured by treasures left behind. Even today, I meet an astonishing number of educators who studied under Jack, or studied under somebody who studied under Jack; or were influenced in one way or another by his take-no-prisoners battle to get kids reading." Indeed!

Reading these moving write-ups helped me to see the far-reaching impact Dr. Bushman had on the field of English education, young adult literature, and writing instruction. What a powerful force he was! I am grateful for Dr. Franklin's efforts to memorialize him so meaningfully in this issue of *Kansas English*. Thank you, John, for giving us all a glimpse into Jack's lasting impact on English education in Kansas and beyond!

In addition to this tribute, this volume features a new column by Dr. Beth Gulley called Teaching Tips. As you can see in the call for manuscripts in the front matter or on the [Kansas English website](#), this column features 250-500 word write-ups of classroom-tested teaching tips, lessons, or activities from all levels of language and literacy education from kindergarten to college. This column was Dr. Gulley's brainchild, and the debut is fantastic! I hope you'll consider submitting your teaching tips for consideration for future issues of *Kansas English*! In addition, if you have an idea for a new column for the journal, contact me at Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu.

Please enjoy this issue of *Kansas English*, and consider participating in the professional conversation by [submitting your own work for the 2023 issue](#)! Until next time, happy teaching and learning!

Katherine Mason Cramer
Professor and Program Chair, English Education
Wichita State University

A RARE QUIET AFTERNOON

Nancy Hamilton Sturm
USD 259 Retired, Wichita State University

“Class,” Ms. Woods announced, smoothing her navy-blue pencil skirt, “open your enrollment books to page three and read the first paragraph with me.”

While the counselor explained the enrollment procedure to my 30 juniors, I grabbed a stack of papers from a nearby shelf. Then I sat at my desk at the back of the room with my red pen and started grading.

I enjoyed having the counselor visit my room. She was in total control of the students, and I could relax and grade a few papers. Today she came to my portable for the last class of the day. I sighed and smiled, ready for a rare quiet afternoon.

Before long, however, I noticed Julia and Emma at the front of the room with their heads together, talking. Since they were generally well behaved, I was surprised and disappointed by their talking. I waved my hand to catch their attention, put my finger to my lips and gave them “the look” to quiet them. In unison they mouthed to me, “There’s a mouse.” They pointed to the side of the room where the rodent wandered.

The mouse seemed oblivious to the 32 people in the room and continued exploring. It rambled past my desk and jumped onto a low bookshelf, sniffing at the stacked papers resting there. I sure didn’t want it darting past my feet, so I stopped grading papers and kept close watch on its progress.

Julia and Emma kept turning their heads away from the counselor to see where the uninvited little guest had wandered. Other students, curious to know what the girls were watching, turned their heads and spotted the furry creature on the bottom shelf. Soon seven or eight of us scrutinized the mouse’s explorations. The counselor, fortunately, had not noticed the little intruder. Yet.

Gradually, more and more students detected the meandering mouse, and more heads turned to look where it explored. After sniffing one stack of papers, it hopped down and moved to the next shelf, unmindful of all the watching eyes. Next, it nosed around some books before moving on.

Noticing the students’ inattention, Ms. Woods impatiently tap, tap, tapped the toe of her three-inch heels and raised her voice. “Class,” she said, “pay attention. Now this is important. If you want your schedule correct next year, follow my directions exactly.”

By now our little guest had traveled the length of the room. He had nowhere else to explore. Then he made his fatal mistake. Instead of wandering back the way he had come, he bolted toward the front of the room, right between two rows of desks. Chaos erupted.

All 12 students on either side of the streaking mouse jumped out of their seats and screamed. Jaelyn and Marissa jumped on top of their chairs. Terrified of the mouse, Bradley jumped high in the air to get away from it. As he landed, he inadvertently kicked the mouse into a desk leg, killing it. Now that the mouse no longer scurried about, Bradley was fearless. With a yell of triumph, he grabbed the tail and picked up the tiny troublemaker, raising it triumphantly in the air. The girls screamed, and the boys yelled in victory; they had defeated the beast. Thirty loud voices echoed around the room.

With her hands waving in the air above her head and her mouth wide open, Ms. Woods was the first to run out of my portable classroom screaming, her three-inch heels clomping on the wood

floor. In a mad rush, the girls scurried out right behind her, their arms above their heads too, their screams piercing the air. Right behind them dashed the boys, thumping their chests and yelling triumphantly. They carried their trophy—the dead mouse—and jubilantly celebrated their successful hunt. Within a matter of seconds, I stood alone in my now empty room.

Following them outside, I saw Mr. Miller, the teacher next door, running down the stairs from his portable, looking panicked. “What happened?” He yelled above all the chattering voices.

I shrugged my shoulders and said, “A mouse.”

The poor man had heard all the commotion and thought there had been a riot in my class. “Oh,” he said, shaking his head and grinning in relief as he returned to his students.

My students all chattered at once, giving their own accounts of the story. It took a few minutes to calm them enough to return to my room.

The counselor refused to enter the portable, even though the mouse was dead. “No way,” she said, hands on her hips, “you won’t get me back in that room. Not with a mouse!” She ordered one of the students to retrieve her enrollment materials from the room and hustled into the main building toward the mouse-free safety of her office.

With lots of excited chitchat, the students and I filed back into the room and spent the last few minutes of class reliving the excitement.

“Did you see that mouse bolt for the front of the room?”

“Ms. Woods is afraid of mice!”

“Yuck. That was gross!”

“Man, Bradley was so quick. He kicked that mouse to its death.”

After the closing bell rang and the students rushed out the door to tell their friends about the mouse adventure, I sat quietly for a few rare moments. Then I walked to the low shelf to grab a stack of papers to grade at home. After checking to make sure our tiny guest hadn’t left any unwanted deposits, I picked up the papers and retrieved my purse and keys.

As I locked the door to my room and headed to the parking lot, I sighed and smiled. Thanks to our uninvited guest, my quiet afternoon would have to wait until the weekend. I did have to admit; however, even though it wasn’t quiet, it was certainly a rare afternoon.

***To the best of my ability, I have related an event that actually occurred in my classroom. Names have been changed to protect the innocent.

Author Biography

After teaching English at Wichita Heights High School for 21 years, Nancy Sturm has pursued other interests in retirement. At last, she has had time to read and write more, to learn to tap dance and line dance, take long walks in the woods, and spend as much time with family as possible. Mrs. Sturm has spent years since retirement working as a University Supervisor at Wichita State University, hoping to pass along a bit of wisdom to the next generation of teachers. If you are a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* fan, you may have read some of Nancy’s writings in their books. She also has published over a dozen devotions and has written a collection of meditations which she hopes will find a publisher. You can contact Nancy at nancy.h.sturm@gmail.com. Read some free devotions (or listen to the audio versions) at her blog, <https://inspirational-author.com>.

YA Book Review

IN A FREE COUNTRY, WE ARE NOT FREE

Celese Arnold
Wichita State University

In *We Are Not Free* (2020) by Traci Chee, fourteen Japanese-American teenagers struggle to adapt to a world without freedom as they are forced from their homes in urban California to internment camps in the deserts of the western United States. Throughout their years in internment, we see the teens' changes as they band together in spite of the violent racism that they both witness and experience, but we also see them grow apart as they try to find success in the world outside the camps.

Each chapter centers around a new teen. The first chapter introduces us to Minoru "Minnow" Ito, the youngest of a trio of brothers. Minnow introduces the neighborhood that most of the teens are from, and he introduces some of the first of the violent acts committed on them. We are introduced to even more characters as the teens move through the internment camps, where another problem surfaces as the teens have to decide where their loyalties lie through an accusatory questionnaire that asks them to renounce whatever loyalties they may have had with Japan. We finally witness the death of one of the teens in a later chapter, as David "Twitchy" Hashimoto joins the military to prove his loyalty and is subsequently killed in battle.

Both history and English teachers could benefit from using this novel in class discussions about World War II and the effects it had on teenagers, as this novel was inspired by true events that Traci Chee's grandparents and other Japanese-American people experienced during the war. While this book may touch on an older subject, it can also be tied into more recent events, such as the attacks on Asian-Americans during the COVID pandemic. The casual language will appeal to students, as well as the pictures of the actual internment camp and other regalia from the time. Along with this, there are still moments within the story that will appeal to young adults such as when the teens go to a movie together, or when they describe crushes and first loves.

While there are many good reasons to use this book in a classroom setting, it may be confusing for some readers as each chapter is from a different point of view. Sometimes it can be harder to keep up with who is who, especially because many of the characters are known by nicknames rather than their given birth names. There are also a few Japanese-American slang words; however, these are defined shortly after they are first used. To help keep track of characters, there is an illustration in the beginning of the book that lists each of the characters' full names, nicknames, ages, and where they are from.

For students who need more help visualizing the Japanese internment, this book would work really well in tandem with some of the graphic novels created about Japanese internment, such as *Citizen 13660* by Mine Okubo or *They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei.

Author Biography

Celesa B. Arnold earned her Bachelor's of Secondary English Education at Wichita State University in spring 2022. While at WSU, Celesa participated in programs such as the International Buddy Program and the Study Abroad Program, through which she studied in South Korea. She was recognized as a Study Abroad Ambassador, and has worked with students from Japan and Korea. Celesa is also a member of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English and presented this book at the Fall 2021 Conference. Celesa plans to teach English as a Second Language in South Korea. She can be reached at celesearnold@yahoo.com.



Wichita State University English teacher interns present at the 2021 KATE Conference in Wichita, KS.

From left to right: Celesa Arnold, Kalie Dudeck, Claudia Esparza, Dr. Katie Cramer, David Hole, Rosie Marino, Kiara Suarez-Sosa

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EVERYONE



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TEACHER READ-ALOUDS: MORE THAN JUST STORY TIME

Kayln Hoppe
Kansas State University

Abstract

Read-alouds not only reinforce story time traditions but also hold significant educational value when used strategically. Reading aloud benefits all students, no matter the grade or achievement level. This article explores a number of research-based academic benefits of reading aloud in K-12 classrooms. The author shares practical tips for prioritizing read-aloud time, selecting appropriate text, modeling various reading strategies, making read-alouds interactive, and promoting vocabulary and language development. The author provides a list of current, award-winning K-12 picture books and chapter books to elevate classroom read-aloud experiences.

Key Words

read-aloud, literacy instruction, K-12 classroom, reading aloud

When you think back to your own elementary school experiences, what memories stand out to you the most? Common experiences may include gathering on the carpet, captivated by a story being read aloud by the teacher. Reading aloud is a treasured reading tradition that takes place in classrooms all over the world. Teachers and students alike savor the authentic connections that shared read-aloud experiences offer and often cherish those memories for a lifetime. When teachers read aloud, they inspire students to read independently and ultimately create communities of readers in our classrooms (Laminack, 2017).

Reading aloud not only promotes reading joy but is also a fundamental activity for building knowledge and encouraging academic success across all grade levels and content areas (Anderson, 1985; Laminack, 2017; Layne, 2015; Trelease, 2019). When teachers read aloud, they model fluent reading, stimulate dialogue, boost comprehension, and promote vocabulary acquisition (Laminack, 2017; Trelease, 2019; Wright, 2018). Moreover, read-alouds appeal to students of all academic abilities, whether they are reluctant, proficient, or accelerated readers. If read-alouds are inexpensive, yet highly effective ways to connect to and educate students, how can teachers elevate instructional time so that students can reap the emotional and cognitive benefits of reading aloud? The following tips can help K-12 teachers maximize read-aloud time.

Prioritize Read-Alouds

In order to elevate read-aloud experiences, teachers must prioritize them. Designate a time and place for reading aloud and honor that commitment every day. For example, starting class with a read-aloud will ensure it happens consistently. It might be difficult to make a habit out of reading

aloud every day, but it is not impossible. Fisher et al. (2020) suggested that it helps to frame language to state why read-alouds are used, “I use read-alouds to...” In addition Layne (2015) recommended that teachers display a “Do Not Disturb” sign outside of the classroom door before facilitating read-alouds, as it sends a message to the students and outside guests that reading aloud is valuable instructional time. As reading aloud becomes a daily habit, under no circumstances should teachers “cancel” read-alouds as this implies that reading aloud is not important instructional time (Layne, 2015). While these instructional tips might seem like minor adjustments, they can hold teachers accountable for utilizing read-alouds as instructional time.

With strategic planning, one read aloud text can accomplish multiple objectives (Lane & Wright, 2007). For example, a teacher can model fluent reading, inferencing, and making text-to-text connections within the span of one text. As students advance through school and may not rely on their teachers to model reading as much, they can participate in collaborative read-alouds activities that combine interactive read-alouds and Reader’s Theater (Elliot-Johns & Puig, 2015) where students have opportunities to read aloud. While upper grade teachers may not have as much instructional time to read aloud (Routman, 1991), it is still possible. Secondary teachers may consider reading aloud song lyrics and poems (Reynolds, 2018), short articles, or short stories (Easley, 2004). Another option for upper grades is reading aloud crossover picture books, or narrative texts that contain controversial characters and social issues, which appeal to both younger and older readers (Beckett, 2021; Bintz & Ciecierski, 2021).

Secondary teachers may consider reading aloud song lyrics and poems (Reynolds, 2018), short articles, or short stories (Easley, 2004). Another option for upper grades is reading aloud crossover picture books, or narrative texts that contain controversial characters and social issues, which appeal to both younger and older readers (Beckett, 2021; Bintz & Ciecierski, 2021).

Carefully Select Text

Proper book selection is essential in implementing read-alouds. In fact, the type of text will influence the type of thinking in which students engage (Braid & Finch, 2015). While selecting and planning for read-alouds, identify the purpose for using the text and anticipate the types of thinking it may initiate. Use this opportunity to also expose students to a variety of writing styles, genres (Lane & Wright, 2007) and diverse authors and characters (Boston & Baxley, 2007). Reading experiences should be centered around the readers (Rosenblatt, 1995), and in order to connect to the read-aloud texts, students must be able to see themselves in the stories (Larrick, 1965). As technology continues to play a key role in our everchanging society, teachers must find ways to integrate it into literacy instruction (Larson, 2015). One way to implement technology-rich read-alouds is through audiobooks. Some researchers consider audiobook reading to be “real reading” (Irwin, 2009; Moyer, 2011), and it should be used in conjunction with print texts (Mediatore, 2003; Pederson & Have, 2012). Just like traditional print-text read-alouds, audiobooks can activate and build background knowledge (Moore & Cahill, 2016), connect written and spoken literacies (Frey & Fisher, 2006), and promote critical thinking and listening skills (Trelease, 2019).

Quality read-alouds should include texts that convey a clear reading purpose, build content and vocabulary knowledge, share diverse perspectives, and make cross-curricular connections (Fisher et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2020; Wright, 2018). Texts should align with learning standards and objectives to maximize instruction (Johnston, 2017). Along with academic requirements, consider students’ personal interests and social-emotional needs (Fisher et al., 2004; Trelease, 2019). To secure books that students will likely enjoy, observe what they read during independent reading time and ask them for book recommendations. To find high-quality children’s and young adult literature,

browse distinguished fiction and nonfiction book award lists, like the E.B. White Read Aloud Award, the Randolph Caldecott Medal, the John Newbery Medal, or the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal (Fisher et al., 2004) to name a few. To celebrate diversity and multicultural reading, consider honorary lists like the Coretta Scott King Award and Honor, Jane Addams Children’s Book Award, and Pura Belpré Award (Boyd et al., 2015; Kesler et al., 2020). See the table below for examples of high-quality K-12 titles.

K-12 Read-Aloud Titles

Title	Author	Award	Grade Levels	Instructional Focus
<i>See the Cat: Three Stories About a Dog</i>	David LaRochelle	2021 Theodor Seuss Geisel Winner	K-2	Retell Events in a Story; Describe Characters, Setting, and Plot
<i>Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story</i>	Kevin Nobel Maillard	2020 Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Winner	K-3	Identify Main Idea and Details; Determine Meaning of Unknown Words
<i>Du İz Tak</i>	Carson Ellis	2017 E.B. White Read-Aloud Winner, 2017 Caldecott Honor	K-6	Decode Unfamiliar Words, Make Inferences
<i>We Dream of Space</i>	Erin Entrada Kelly	2021 Newbery Honor	3-7	Compare and Contrast Point of View, Interpret Words and Phrases Used in the Text
<i>Efrén Divided</i>	Ernesto Cisneros	2021 Pura Belpré Winner	4-8	Identify Theme, Analyze Character Development
<i>Genesis Begins Again</i>	Alicia D. Williams	2020 Newbery Honor	4-8	Identify Theme, Make Inferences
<i>All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys’ Soccer Team</i>	Christina Soontornvat	2021 Robert F. Sibert Honor, 2021 Newbery Honor, 2021 Orbis Pictus Honor	3-12	Make Inferences, Compare and Contrast Individual Personalities
<i>The Undefeated</i>	Kwame Alexander	2020 Caldecott Winner, 2020 Newbery Honor, 2020 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Winner	3-12	Analyze Illustrations, Determine Author’s Point of View
<i>The Girl Who Drank the Moon</i>	Kelly Barnhill	2017 Newbery Medal	5-12	Make Inferences, Analyze How Structure Contributes to Meaning of the Text
<i>Kent State</i>	Deborah Wiles	2021 Odyssey Award Winner	7-12	Compare and Contrast Point of View; Analyze Character, Event, and Idea Development
<i>Firekeeper’s Daughter</i>	Angeline Boulley	2022 Walter Dean Myers Award, Teen Category	9-12	Analyze Character Development, Make Inferences

<i>Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice</i>	Bryan Stevenson	2019 Flora Stieglitz Straus Award for Older Readers	9-12	Identify and Discuss Author’s Point of View, Determine Central Ideas
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Model Strategic Reading

Read-alouds are essentially mentor texts that allow for students to listen to the most fluent reader in the room—the teacher (Laminack, 2017). Outside of read-alouds, students rarely hear a well-written text read from beginning to end by someone with such familiarity and respect (Laminack, 2017). Moreover, students can develop favorable feelings toward reading the more teachers read aloud (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014). As teachers read aloud, they should engage in “think-alouds”, or model their thinking out loud, to demonstrate proficient thinking that caters to students’ specific literacy needs (Fisher et al., 2020).

In primary grades, incorporating authentic read-aloud experiences is more likely to spark student motivation than teaching phonics in isolation (Trelease, 2009). As teachers model phonetic decoding strategies during read-alouds, they should also concentrate on the prosodic elements of reading, such as pacing, inflection, mood, and intensity, in order to draw students into the story (Johnston, 2016; Laminack, 2017; Layne, 2015; Morrison & Włodarczyk, 2009). When reading with expression and animated voices, teachers are sure to captivate students’ attention and imagination.

As students grow older and become more proficient readers, they are less likely to engage in regular read-aloud experiences in school (Laminack, 2017; Layne, 2015; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Trelease, 2019). In light of pressure to focus on standardized test preparation in upper grades, teachers should know that reading aloud has been proven to increase standardized test scores (Anderson et al., 1985; Elley; 1992). Students can often listen and comprehend texts at a much higher level than they can by reading the text themselves, which is even more reason to continue reading aloud as students grow older (Layne, 2015; Trelease, 2019). Even in high school and beyond, educators can use read-alouds with rich subject matter to support vocabulary development, comprehension, and academic growth (Massey, 2015; Richardson, 2000). Finally, it is important to remember that older students enjoy being read to just as much as younger students (Freeman et al., 2011; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003; Trelease, 2019).

No matter the grade level, teachers should also employ effective comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading to support understanding. Text functions vary depending on genre and are written for distinct purposes. As teachers read aloud, they should demonstrate *how* and *why* literary and nonfiction text structures nurture a reader’s ability to understand the text on a deeper level (Wright, 2018). Comprehension strategies will vary in complexity but are necessary no matter the context or grade level. For example, in accordance with the Common Core State Standards, second graders could compare two or more versions of the same story while twelfth graders might analyze and evaluate multiple versions of the same story ((NGA & CSSO, 2010).

Before reading, it is important that students understand the purpose(s) for reading (Fisher et al., 2004). Read-alouds not only establish students’ background knowledge but also activate any existing schema (Johnston, 2016; Kaefer, 2020; Laminack, 2017). As students listen to read-alouds, they are strengthening their cultural knowledge and understandings of the world around them (Kesler et al., 2020; Wright, 2018). Take the time to inquire about students’ prior experiences and encourage them to make personal connections and predictions related to the text.

During the read-aloud, students can continue building upon their existing knowledge by making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Engage in teacher “think alouds” to model making connections, as well as

more complex reading comprehension strategies like inferencing and visualizing (Johnston, 2016; Marchessault & Larwin, 2014; Lapp et al, 2008). Visualization is crucial, especially when reading aloud chapter books or texts with few illustrations (Layne, 2015). Interactive anchor charts, vocabulary word walls, drawing pictures, and even role-playing will help strengthen students' comprehension during read-alouds.

After reading aloud, students should respond to the text (Johnston, 2016; Hancock, 2008; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Read-alouds often elicit students' uncertainties and revelations, and they should be given time to understand and communicate them, either through written, verbal, or artistic expression (Trelease, 2019). Aside from the traditional paper and pencil methods, teachers should utilize available classroom technology when prompting reader response (Clarke, 2014; Lee, 2012). The following reader response activities can be adapted for any grade level: think-pair-share collaboration, illustrating big ideas/main ideas, recording FlipGrid reflection videos, writing a letter to the author, or participating in service-learning projects.

Make It Interactive

As teachers model intentional reading behaviors before, during, and after read-alouds, students become an integral part of the reading experience, even if they are not actually reading the text themselves. Traditional teacher read-alouds position students as passive listeners, whereas interactive read-alouds encourage the involvement of both students and teachers (Fisher et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2020; Johnston, 2017; Wright, 2018). As students take charge and interact with the text and each other, their ideas expand and evolve (Braid & Finch, 2015). Students can learn just as much from each other as they do from their teachers.

Dialogue is the foundation for making teacher read-alouds more interactive and should occur before, during, and after reading the text (Fisher et al., 2004). The teacher assumes the role of "facilitator" and enables students to actively think about and control the conversations (Braid & Finch, 2015; Wright, 2018). When sharing picture books, students should be discussing the various facets of the book. The cover, title, endpapers, illustrations, and text are all components that contribute to the overall meaning of the book and should not be ignored (Braid & Finch, 2015). Students should autonomously draw their own conclusions and voice them openly.

As the facilitator of student discussions, teachers should anticipate students' reactions to the text and prepare thought-provoking, open-ended prompts to spark conversation. Likely, every question posed while reading aloud is related to a necessary reading skill, such as sequencing events, identifying main ideas or making inferences (Layne, 2015). Open-ended questions encourage students to think critically and will gauge their comprehension on a deeper level (Johnston, 2017).

Questions beginning with *what*, *where*, and *why* can encourage students to express their own thoughts rather than regurgitate one precise answer (Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2019; Lane & Wright, 2007). "What did you think?" or "How did that make you feel?" are simple, yet powerful questions to facilitate discussions (Neumann, 2009; Trelease, 2019). It is important to note that teachers should not be the only ones to pose questions; students should generate and share their own (Laminack, 2017).

Promote Vocabulary Acquisition and Oral Language Development

An interactive read-aloud is a teaching tool that directly impacts vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary is not built through skills practice but through authentic experiences (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Students encounter more complex words through books and dialogic reading than through spoken language, therefore, their vocabularies increase more through read-aloud experiences than through casual conversation (Senechal et al., 1996; Trelease, 2019). As teachers plan for read-alouds,

they should brainstorm content-specific, valuable, and unusual words that can be highlighted during class discussions (Johnston, 2017; Laminack, 2017; Lane & Wright, 2007).

Reading-aloud fuels listening and thinking growth (Fisher et al., 2020). Since listening comprehension levels nurture and surpass silent reading comprehension levels (Layne, 2015; Trelease, 2019) texts above students' independent and instructional levels are favorable for read-alouds (Layne, 2015). Layne (2015) coined this idea as the act of "listening up" (p. 55). As students "listen up", they are exposed to vocabulary, fictional elements, and informational text structures that are more advanced than those offered in grade-level texts (Layne, 2015).

Listening to these words being read aloud is not enough for students; they must have time to actively process the new language (Lane & Wright, 2017; Wright, 2018). To actively process newly acquired vocabulary, students need opportunities to manipulate those words in various ways. Younger students could practice using the words in complete sentences, discuss synonyms and antonyms, and illustrate or role-play words. Older students could analyze root words and affixes, practice identifying and using context clues, and interpret figures of speech.

Simply put, the more words students hear, the more words they learn. The number of words students hear and can understand, otherwise known as receptive vocabulary, are significantly higher than their expressive vocabulary, the words they actually use (Beck and McKeown, 2001). Reading aloud, combined with student-centered discussions that articulate newly acquired language, reinforces necessary oral skills (Santoro et al., 2008). Like the expression, "Rome wasn't built in a day," neither is vocabulary acquisition and oral language development. It is a gradual process that takes time to develop and read-alouds can make the process more enjoyable for all involved.

Closing Thoughts

Reading-aloud is "a simple act with magnificent and complex results" (Gurdon, 2019, p. xvi). While teaching in a culturally and academically diverse classroom, I prioritized read-alouds every day. Whether I was reading aloud picturebooks or chapter books, my students could expect every class period to start out with a read-aloud. Read-alouds quickly became a class time favorite, and for that short period of time every day, we were immersed in a shared reading experience that brought us together as a classroom community. I noticed my students were not only excited for read-alouds but were more motivated to read independently and share their books with me and with each other. My goal to develop lifelong readers unfolded right before my eyes, and I have never felt prouder. When prioritized and utilized properly, read-alouds endorse tremendous literacy growth and achievement. Reading aloud is not a luxury that should be afforded only on special occasions; it is an indispensable tool that expands beyond classic storytime and plants the seed for a lifetime of reading enjoyment and success.

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YA Book Review

THE GREAT GATSBY FRESHLY REVISITED: DEBORAH LINN'S *JUST DAISY*

James V. Jacobs

Daisy Fay's mother left her with words to live by when she said, "A confident woman is a powerful thing, ... The Universe be damned." However, Daisy is struggling to find that *confidence* to realize her mother's advice.

Daisy displays outward signs of a self-assured young woman. She enjoys opulence, makes good grades, and is the most popular girl at prestigious East Eggerton Academy, an upscale high school in the affluent Chicago suburb of East Eggerton. Daisy also goes with Tom Buchanan, the school's most popular boy and star quarterback on the football team. Like Daisy, Tom comes from one of the premier East Eggerton families. He's the guy everyone expects Daisy to someday walk down the aisle with like royalty—to have his kids, be on his arm at all the high-society events, attend the obligatory ladies' meetings at the country club.

But Daisy feels that something is wrong with her life of privilege.

It's been three years since Daisy's parents died in a crash, and it seems that Daisy is still mourning them. Her problem, though, goes deeper than her parents' tragedy. Maybe it's Tom; he's not *the one*. It seems she can't quite put her finger on it. Or is it that Daisy Fay really does know her problem, but is in denial?

Deborah Linn's young adult novel *Just Daisy*, published in 2021, begins with the main character meeting her friends at a beach just off Chicago's Gold Coast, the neighborhood where the city's rich and powerful reside. Daisy and her Grandma Betty, with whom she lives, have returned to Chicago from a three-month getaway on Tybee, a paradise-like isle off Georgia's Savannah Coast. Daisy refers to Tybee as "family Island," because Tybee's property was bought up by distant relatives, streets even named for them. Daisy and her parents used to spend a lot of time on the island—and the past summer Tybee is where Daisy was swept off her feet by the mysterious Jamie Gatsby.

The subtitle to Linn's novel describes it as "A Gatsby Retelling." But *Just Daisy* is not a knockoff of *The Great Gatsby*. Linn simply uses F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic as a template, much as a skilled artist uses another artist's masterpiece as inspiration to create her own unique work—and *Just Daisy* stands on its own as very good YA literature.

Linn does borrow the names of Fitzgerald's characters. In addition to Daisy and Tom, there is the immensely wealthy and independent Gatsby, the blond, tanned Adonis who suddenly appears

hundreds of miles from Tybee to begin the school year at East Eggerton Academy, continuing his seduction of Daisy, as they renew their secret love with clandestine trysts in an isolated alcove of the school building.

There is Jordan, a blunt and perceptive young woman and Daisy's best friend. Myrtle, beautiful and sexy, is abused and discarded over and over. Nick Carraway, a cousin to Daisy, is a trusted ally and editor of the school newspaper. But Nick is not the story's narrator, as Daisy narrates the first-person tale, driven forward with strong verbs and figurative language painting vivid imagery for the book's audience.

Linn takes the reader on a roller coaster ride featuring a hedonistic party thrown by Jamie. It's a bash open to "everybody" who attends East Eggerton Academy, even the school's commoners. Gatsby provides a night filled with drugs, booze, and sex. The teen orgy's highlight is a fight between quick and agile Gatsby and the brute-like Tom Buchanan.

Then, the reader is taken to the homecoming dance, East Eggerton's most anticipated teen event. There, at the crowning of homecoming king and queen, Daisy Fay issues her declaration of independence.

Initially it seemed that the novel is about the triangle between Daisy, Jamie and Tom, as Linn coaxes the reader to empathize with Daisy—to feel the confusion she has over her feelings for Tom and her feelings for Jamie. One of whom takes Daisy for granted both socially and sexually, while the other offers her a fairy tale romance punctuated with passionate love making.

However, it becomes clear that Linn's story is not really about the love triangle. That is simply a literary vehicle to carry the reader to the real story—Daisy's discovery and resolution of her problem. The most important character, other than Daisy Fay, appears midway into the story. Claudia Hip is Daisy's model of that *confident woman*. Hip introduces Daisy to a world beyond Eggerton—and beyond Daisy's self-absorption. By focusing on other people and their needs, Daisy finds herself, fulfills her mother's hope for her daughter, and is ready to start life away from Eggerton as a confident woman—a powerful woman.

The novel will easily appeal to secondary school readers interested in the glamorous, wild parties as well as the conflict between Gatsby and Tom. Daisy's development into independence will no doubt delight many adult readers, too.

Linn's novel could serve as supplemental material for American history and American literature.

For parents or others who challenge the book's inclusion in the school curriculum, an easy option would be to offer Fitzgerald's work in its stead.

Author Biography

James V. Jacobs was educated at Indiana Wesleyan University and Western Illinois University. He worked in Civil Rights for the Urban League, taught fifth grade, and taught writing at Carl Sandburg Community College. Jacobs received awards for teaching and human relations. They include *Award of Excellence* from the Illinois Math and Science Academy, *League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Teacher of the Year Award*, *Honored Teacher Award* from the University of Iowa, *Outstanding Alumni Award* from Indiana Wesleyan University, *Outstanding Dedication to Education Citation* from Boston University, and the *Human Relations Award* from the Galesburg (IL) Human Relations Commission. Jacobs was also part owner of HRC, Inc., a business dealing with racism. Jacobs' essays and short stories have appeared in *The Prairie Journal*, *The Zephyr*, and the literary/art magazine *Phizzogs*. Additionally, *The Midwest Book Review* called Jacobs's first novel *No Ordinary Season* "[an] extraordinary novel that is ... very highly recommended ..." He can be reached at jvjake1964ghs@gmail.com.

YA Book Review

DAUGHTER OF THE DEEP: RICK RIORDAN DIVES INTO SCIENCE FICTION

John Franklin

Pittsburg State University

Science fiction fans will be delighted to discover that Rick Riordan has turned his formidable tale-telling talent to their world, initiating a new series of adventures based on Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and *The Mysterious Island*.

Fans of the prolific Riordan will recognize his recipe: a plucky protagonist, competition between two schools, a fast-moving plot, and an imaginative setting simultaneously comfortable and intriguing.

Our protagonist is Ana, descended from Verne's Captain Nemo, himself a rebellious Asian-Indian prince disenchanted with imperialist, culture-destroying nations bent on colonizing lands with exploitable resources.

Orphaned when her parents die at sea, Ana is a freshman at Harding-Pencroft Academy (H-P), an ocean-centric school where her older brother Dev is an upperclassman.

Opposed to H-P (the reverberations with Harry Potter are tongue-in-cheek intentional) is its rival school: the Land Institute. Each school was founded by characters from Verne's novel a century-and-a-half or so ago. Turns out the characters are real, as are the inventions that Nemo and his crew used on their global journey. The competitors are locked in deadly conflict to recreate or discover—and then control—Nemo's marvels. H-P's goals are good for the world. Land's? Not so much.

The series opens with a sea voyage that is a rite of passage for Ana and her fellow freshmen. Long-time readers of Riordan will recognize and predict plot points as he skillfully employs foreshadowing to engage us episodically through his saga.

The setting is likewise comfortably familiar as H-P's freshmen class is divided into four houses: Dolphin, Shark, Cephalopod and Orca, with each emphasizing specific skills. As at Potter's Hogwarts, each house has a prefect.

This 2021 publication will no doubt appeal to those middle schoolers (and us older fans) who have devoured Riordan's previous offerings of Percy Jackson, Apollo, et al.

The book and its sequels could easily find a place alongside and within STEM and film classes that transport students through the permeable interface separating science and fiction; imagination and possibility; our past, our present and our future. The author maintains his commendable sensitivity to and awareness of diversity, including humans and marine species.

If challenges arise, then teachers can simply offer Verne's original classics as alternative texts. My guess? Students will seek them on their own.

Role-model characters, thematic conflict, fast-paced plot, a setting both familiar and exotic—these literary elements along with his continuing themes of tolerance and acceptance combine to make *Daughter of the Deep* my new favorite Rick Riordan 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



SESTINA FOR A PANDEMIC

Julianna E. Lopez Kershen
University of Oklahoma

Rising today, the air is chilled, and the morning sun
Reflects in the dew glistening on the budding leaves.
I hear your voices. Song fills the expanse,
Entering the house between window glass and sill.
First a thin quiver, then ensues a choral arrangement of birdsong.
My feet step to the floor over the bedside.

The sprouting cotyledons have grown first, second, and third leaves
Although only weeks have passed in this expanse
When time is measured now in birdsong.
I rest in the chair at our bedside.
After pushing up the glass above the sill,
I listen to the humid evening marked by the setting sun.

Now in the third month since this began, a measured expanse
Of homeschool and cooking, of coffee and birdsong,
I watch you and your mate outside my sill.
I watch the way you carry threads to build your bedside.
Each day you fly away and back with the sun.
I mark the hours by walking out to check the new blooms under the leaves.

I dig into hard earth wearing a hat to ward off the sun,
and children's voices create a constant background filling the expanse
Within our house, yard, and streets. No space here for a quiet bedside.
Ambulance sirens wail alongside the shiver of leaves,
And a timer rings intrusion. A computer sings an electronic birdsong.
Seeking repose, I shut the window to meet the sill.

Tonight thunder wakes me in this season of birdsong.
The sky flashing alight, I reach to the lamp along the bedside.
I wonder, how many hours until the sun?
One hand to the left twists the switch, and one reaches right to feel for his expanse.
His even snores are barely audible through the crashing outside the sill
As streaks illuminate the blackness and needed rain falls upon the leaves.

As summer comes and strange spring gives way to endless sun
I lie here twisted in sheets, sweating, catching my breath, as in the expanse
Below the windowpane the paint peels along the sill.

The heat of the day is rising, and the garden beckons me to part the leaves
To check for hornworms, aphids, and squash bugs, whose bedside
Within the plants seems more urgent than before. I rise to a morning rich with birdsong.

These days at home have been bizarre, exhausting, yet magical. Birdsong
comes with the sun and open sill. Blinking awake, sleepy at his bedside,
Our lives turn a corner, opening and narrowing into an unexpected expanse between leaves.

Author Biography

Julianna (she/her) is an education researcher, writer, and teacher in Norman, Oklahoma. Julianna studies expertise development within language and literacy learning. In August 2022 she will join the faculty at the University of Oklahoma as an Assistant Professor of English Education. Reach out to Julianna at julianna.kershen@gmail.com and @juliannaelk.

KATE SUMMER BOOK CLUB

Jul. 9, 2022
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Three Simple Lines
A Writer's Pilgrimage into the Heart and Homeland of Haiku
Natalie Goldberg
Author of Writing Down the Bones

Register online at kansasenglish.org
Meeting via Zoom

YA Book Review

VIOLENCE AND OBEDIENCE: TEENAGER BATTLES INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FORCES IN REYNOLDS'S *LONG WAY DOWN*

Marci Heatherly

Pittsburg State University

A descent into hell in literature is not solely reserved for Dante and his work *The Inferno*. Jason Reynolds's 2017 young adult novel *Long Way Down* centers around fifteen-year-old Will Holloman and his uncomfortable descent downward in his apartment elevator.

During his elevator ride, Will is greeted on each floor by ghosts of his loved ones who have died as a result of the gun violence in his neighborhood. Each ghost encounter raises Will's anxiety and doubt surrounding whether or not he should continue on his quest to avenge his brother. To avenge his brother, Shawn, Will has to follow The Rules of the neighborhood, "If someone you love gets killed, find the person who killed them and kill them," (33) but Will could also choose to break the cycle of violence by going up to his apartment.

Through Will's internal conflict of deciding whether to follow The Rules, and the external conflict of living in such a violent neighborhood, Jason Reynolds addresses the hardships people living in low socioeconomic areas face daily. An appropriate way to teach these hardships would be to engage in cultural studies, and spend the first day of a teaching unit researching living conditions for these areas.

Long Way Down should appeal to middle and secondary school readers for two reasons.

First, the protagonist Will Holloman is a 15-year-old boy, meaning he would be a freshman or sophomore in high school. Will's age and his adolescent word choice makes him relatable to young adult readers; they can easily assume Will's perspective.

Second, the internal conflict of choosing what to do about his future, to follow The Rules or not, is relatable for middle and secondary school readers. While students are probably not in the exact same elevator as Will Holloman, they can understand the pressure of having to make big decisions. Teenagers are constantly facing questions about their future.

Long Way Down would be an excellent way to introduce poetry, because the novel is written in free verse. It would be beneficial for students to begin a poetry unit with *Long Way Down*, where the language is easy to comprehend.

While I enjoyed every aspect of *Long Way Down*, if I had to pick a favorite quality it would be the style of writing. Not only does the free verse style make it a quick read, but it also allows Reynolds to be creative and use the words themselves to portray bigger ideas. For example, on page 70, Reynolds writes

“DOWN
DOWN
DOWN DOWN DOWN
DOWN DOWN
DOWN,”

creating an elevator’s downward arrow and symbolizing Will’s journey towards hell. Along with this, Reynolds specifically uses “down” seven times for the seven floors Will is about to travel.

I believe there are no reasons to prevent teaching *Long Way Down* in a middle or secondary school classroom. But if any potential challenge could be raised about it would probably be concerning the gun violence in the novel. If a parent did raise that concern, I would argue on behalf of the novel that the violence is a way to educate readers about this current problem in America, and that even though it can be shocking initially, it is important to read about these topics. If they still protest then, of course we could also offer then option of reading Dante’s *Inferno* as an alternate choice.

Author Biography

Marci Heatherly is from Girard, Kansas, and has been interested in English, specifically teaching English at the secondary level, since she was a freshman in high school. Currently, she is a junior in the English Department at Pittsburg State University with a minor in creative writing. In her spare time, she enjoys reading additional works by authors learned about in classes, as well as contemporary short stories and poetry. In May 2022 she will be studying abroad in Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic. She is ecstatic to visit the Kafka Museum in Prague. She can be reached at mheatherly@gus.pittstate.edu.



THE ENLIVENED WORLD OF AN AUTHOR OF MIDDLE GRADE NOVELS: AN INTERVIEW WITH CRYSTAL ALLEN

Dixie K. Keyes
Arkansas State University

Abstract

Crystal Allen, author of six novels for middle grades readers, offers an account of the characters in her books and how readers (children and adults alike) have responded to them. She shares the how and why behind her characters' personalities and possibilities on the landscape of middle grades as she recounts favorite episodes from her novels. Additionally, she explains the OwnVoices movement and chronicles her involvement in organizations that support authors of Color.

Key Words

Crystal Allen, middle grades literature, tween literature, OwnVoices, The Brown Bookshelf

Introduction

Houston-based author Crystal Allen writes books that feature middle grades characters experiencing their best lives in a unique span of time full of turmoil, grace, misadventures, and friendship. Crystal's characters emerge from her heart and mind just as they are—from 13-year-old Lamar whose hero is a famous bowler, to 13-year-old-Almond-Joy-loving Laura who plays baseball and learns lessons from her lineage. Next comes a boot-scootin' fourth-grader named Mya Tibbs who wears pink cowboy boots and loves rodeos. And after that, two brothers—Isaiah and Seth—who face a trying and unexpected tragedy.

Since her first book *How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba-Sized Trophy* was published in 2011, Crystal started and continues a pilgrimage to middle grades classrooms in her



home state and beyond, guiding tween writers in crafting their own stories. Her visits culminate in pizza party celebrations where she provides mentoring and feedback on students' stories. She even publishes some of the short stories from every visited school on her website and calls it "Strikewriters" (there is a play on words related to bowling that those of you who have read her books will understand). In 2013, *The Laura Line* landed in middle grades classrooms and libraries,



and Crystal gained even more fans. Her next character, 9-year-old Mya Tibbs came to life in 2016, and a series was born (*The Magnificent Mya Tibbs: Spirit Week Showdown*, *The Wall of Fame Game* [2017], and *Mya in the Middle* [2018]), receiving accolades from the *Kirkus Review* and *Publisher's Weekly*. Notably, in 2018, she was awarded the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) prestigious Sid Fleischman Humor Award which recognized her excellence in the genre of humor writing. Most recently, the Texas Institute of Letters named Crystal to the ranks of its distinguished honor society, celebrating her literature and recognizing her works as part of the distinctive literary achievement of Texas authors. Her next book *Between Two Brothers* will come out in 2023.

In an interview about her books and the orbit of her writing life, she spoke candidly about reactions from both children and adults to her characters. She also shared how her work in writing and publishing has broadened to being part of a network that is carving paths and plans for younger authors of Color to get their books published and into the hands of young readers. With affirming themes around family and friends, and with constructive episodes around navigating bullying and conflict, Crystal's books beckon to all "twens"—readers, soon-to-be-inspired readers, and readers who need or want to laugh and find a friendly character or two. Crystal opened up about all of this in the heartening interview that follows.

The Interview

Dixie Keys: Why do you write for middle grades readers?

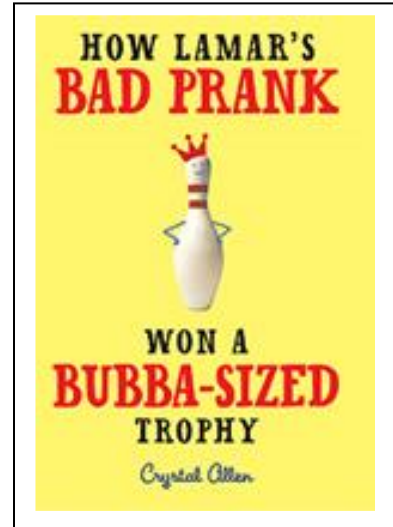
Crystal Allen: Writing for middle graders is essential because to me that is the age where they are really trying to find their way. They are too old for some things but old enough for others. They still have all the emotional components from the elementary school levels of just wanting to cry it out, to the older version of "I want to be on my own." It's a very difficult age. Writing for them is a way for me to help them understand themselves and to let them know that it's okay to be who they are.

I write a lot about the uncommon child because most of the kids out there *are*. They really fight to be accepted in places (where they really don't have any business trying to be) because their uniqueness is what's really going to make them outstanding. But they don't actually see that because of peer pressures. When I write, I try to help clear that and to show characters that aren't really having a problem with who they are. They are choosing to be themselves as they know it which helps narrow down some of the stress that they have. They have enough; they have the same amount of stress that we have. COVID has affected them too. They have had to stay home and deal with that. You know, I just chose this group because it's not that they're the most inquisitive, but they are the ones that are at the fork. People talk about seniors and juniors in high school, but it's really these kids who are making major decisions in their lives—the roads that they're going to choose. And we're not talking career-wise, we're talking

morally as contributing citizens. We're talking, you know, whether or not they're going to just be a good person. These are huge attributes for them to have to work on at that age, and so I try to write to help them.

Keys: How have your books impacted middle grades children and the adults who work with them? What kinds of comments and responses do you get once they've read the characters in your novels?

Allen: I have gotten different responses for *Lamar* than I did for *The Laura Line*. I got more responses from the actual students on *Lamar*. I got more responses from the teachers and administrative staff on *The Laura Line*. This is what's crazy—for the same reasons. The students told me that, "You know, I know a guy like him (Lamar)" (not really trying to say that it was them), but "I could totally be friends with that guy. You know, he was kind of cool." And, "When are you gonna write another one?" I also got a lot of, "I understand why he pulled the fire alarm ... I didn't really want him to, but he did and I get why he did it because his brother was really treating him in an ugly way and he wanted him to feel what it felt like to be treated that way." So, when I heard this from the students, I wasn't really sure I had made the right move because I didn't want them to think Lamar's breaking the law was okay. So, we would talk about the consequences that Lamar had to deal with.



Now *The Laura Line* ... I have been invited to more women's groups—I didn't even know that retired teachers have like a sorority, a group that gathers from all different schools, and principals too. I got invited to this home that was made up of mostly retired teachers. This evening was all about *The Laura Line*. It was not an actual book club though, but that's just one of many things that they do.

On this particular night they had laid out every food that I had mentioned in *The Laura Line* including a bowl of Almond Joy candy bars. Someone had also made an Almond Joy cake and it was just all kinds of foods on this table from my books, which I thought was really cute. What I kept hearing from them was, "I am Laura. I was brutally bullied when I was little because of blank," and they would fill in the blank: "because I was the only African-American kid in my class.... because my clothes weren't like everyone else's ... because I was this, because I was that." One woman said, "It was almost as if you had written My Story." I actually got the same responses from both the students and the teachers about being able to relate to the character—just in different ways.

Keys: So, humor. I remember when I taught middle school, my students would tell me they valued humor in two ways. They wanted their teachers to be funny, and they wanted books that were funny. And there weren't that many books that were funny because there's always got to be a big conflict or problem for it to be a novel, and often those are not funny. Can you tell me about how—because you won an award in this especially—you integrate humor into a relevant conflict for the middle-school aged characters that you create?

Allen: First, let me back it up a little bit and say humor comes from pain, and a lot of people are able to mask their pain through humor. It's not the only source, but we've all had pain of some sort in our lives. For me, I have chosen to laugh, to make myself laugh more than cry. And

doing that, I just enjoy writing humor. Now when writing a book for middle graders, it is very important that I give them an opportunity to breathe. If I've got a story that I'm writing and it is about to get to a climactic state, and I'm working the story in that direction, then readers will be turning pages because it will definitely be engaging. But they need an opportunity to breathe. And sometimes I'll do that with humor. I won't take away the seriousness of the situation or dilute the plot with it. But I believe humor helps to create a well-rounded character so that you see this character laughing. You see this character doing some crazy things, and she's so funny with something unintentional. Yet, when she hurts usually the reader hurts too because they've already made that commitment as they're reading. So, when a character shows herself as having a pulse, the reader is engaged because they can relate so much more to a well-rounded character who isn't just always serious.

Keys: I love the way you described that. It really would cut the character short if you deprived them of humor within whatever conflict or struggle they're going through in the novel.

Allen: Most definitely. It would just make them a one-dimensional kind of character. I also know that one of the things that I try to do is reach out to my readers who may not have found a book that they like and reading hasn't been something that they've enjoyed in the past. I don't like the word *reluctant*. I was labeled that—a *reluctant* reader—and I just think that we haven't put the right book in their hands. Once we do that, then we may see something take off. But I do know that humor is a great tool we use to help bring those readers—who in the past have shied away from the library—to having a possible relationship with it. I have had a librarian from a high school tell me that she bought a stack of *Lamar* books for her boys who do not like reading, and they took to it like fish to water, laughing and mimicking and acting like Lamar, repeating some of the things he would say and it really went over well. She was very happy and she wrote to me to thank me for that.

Keys: Who do you think your funniest character is? It's got to be Mya, right?

Allen: It's interesting that you ask only because I thought she was so elusive at first, and then she made me go through so many different changes just to get to know her. But I have many people tell me Lamar is my absolute funniest character, and so it just depends on who you ask. For me, I do think it's Mya only because she is just so genuine. She just walks to her own ka-klunk (*that's a reference to her pink cowboy boots*) and doesn't really care. You know everything's a boot-scootin this, or "I'll just have my hair braided and count those days down." She is *so* herself and has tuned out a dream that looks like others would try to corral her in some kind of way. She's not going to be corralled. She is going to be her own girl, and I just absolutely love that about her.



Keys: Mya is read mostly by 9 and 10-year-olds, right?

Allen: Yes, third and fourth graders.

Keys: Can you talk about maybe one or two of the favorite scenes from your books?

Allen: Yes. They all have to do with family. I love family. I believe that it's important that books display love, especially love from a family. Readers should know if they don't have anything else, they have their families.

So, my favorite episode in *Lamar* is towards the end, when Xavier, his brother, gives him a trophy and calls it an MVB instead of the MVP for most valuable player. He called his MVB (most valuable brother), and it was because Lamar had given everything he had to help his brother and Xavier knew it. That to me was one of the most touching scenes in *Lamar*.



For *The Laura Line*, I believe it was a scene that hurt me, and that was when Sage broke the little chair in the shack. It was a chair that was used by the Laura Line (*all of the ancestral "Laura's" in the family*) all throughout the ages, and Grandma had used that chair to color in when she was a little girl. So, it could not be repaired. It was broken and it was gone. That was significant to me because that was the piece I put in there to reflect the fact that I did not go and visit the real house that this story was created around. My mom had a house just like the one depicted in *The Laura Line*. I never went inside. I never went inside and I should have gone inside, but I didn't. And I always thought I'd have time. You know I think we all do that—"I'll have time. I'll just go back another day," and then I became a woman and moved to Texas and got that call that my grandmother had sold the farm to a construction company. The company came through and mowed that house down, broke it into pieces that could not be repaired and I would never be able to go

inside. So, that little piece was a reflection of me—that little scene.

Between Two Brothers is the book I'm finishing up right now, and there are lots of scenes in this book that just step on my heart and smash that sucker flat, as the country song says. The main character is trying his best to understand this catastrophic event that has changed everything, and figure out how he will ever be able to get his brother back. Will they ever be able to have a relationship again? The things he takes himself through to make sure that happens is just phenomenal for this kid. It doesn't grow him or make him make decisions that an adult would make. He makes decisions that a kid who is a brand new 13 would make, and that's not always the right decision. But he's doing what he can to save his relationship with his brother whom he so dearly loves and doesn't want to lose. So, there some very strong scenes in in that story related to that relationship.

Keys: Would you like to share more about *Between Two Brothers* since it will be new to readers who are looking forward to it next year?

Allen: *Between Two Brothers* is a story about Isaiah and Seth who are incredibly close. Seth is on his way to college. Isaiah, being in middle school, doesn't want him to go even though he knows that Seth is excited about the college scholarship he received. But a catastrophic event happens that changes the boys, and they have to figure out a way to heal the relationship, to fix it whatever it takes. It's gut-wrenching in places and there's a lot of truth in the story because it is based on a true story. I'm glad I was able to pen it.

I'm actually happy that I'm finished with *Between Two Brothers*. It was very hard to write that story. The plot does not belong to my sons, but the emotion does. The emotion I took from every member of my immediate family—my husband, my sons, and myself. Then I gave all of the emotion that I've heard from them to Isaiah, the main character. There were times when I

spiraled, and I just went to the deepest basement, you know and couldn't see. I couldn't find my way out and stopped writing for weeks. But at some point, I was able to bring myself out of that basement and climb the steps and get back up into the light and start writing again. I know there's an importance, I know that there's a need for this story, and not just for middle graders. A lot of walls had to come down from in my mind that I put up because I didn't want to revisit those times ever again. And when those walls came down, the smells actually came back in my nose and sounds and things that I wasn't expecting returned, and it caught me off-guard. I mean just in a way that I hadn't noticed before. The experience changed my personality for a while, and so I'm glad to be done. I'm sure my family is glad that I'm finished. I know my editor is very happy and my agent. It usually takes me about five or six months to write a book; this one took me five years to write, and they didn't pressure me at all.

Keys: I was wondering if you could speak to any approach that you've taken when considering diversity in your books.

Allen: First of all, there's something called "OwnVoices." OwnVoices is exactly what it says. For instance, I could not tell the story of your life because I've never been white, and I don't know everything that you have felt in your life through your experiences as a white woman. Even though I have never been a slave, I have been hated on because of my skin color. Just back in 1988 I was denied an opportunity to go to a restroom. It still happens, and that pain is very real. I have no business trying to write a story about the Holocaust if my main character is involved in it. I don't know what that feels like. I have no idea what that feels like. That's what I'm talking about with OwnVoices. Now, if you have two boys—one African-American and one white boy—both wanting to learn how to skateboard, I'm down with that. I have no problems with that because race is not an issue here. I try to write stories where race is not the main issue, but my characters are characters of Color. My main characters are because I want all students to read my stories and feel comfortable reading them. I don't want them reading a story and saying, "Oh, I had to read this for history class." I'm trying to provide enjoyable reading with my characters, and the fight is real. What I just told you, I hear it from Hispanic authors. I hear it from Asian authors. I hear it from every ethnic group that, you know, yes, diversity is so important because that's what we live in. Our world is a gumbo; it's got everything in it, so you can't really create this all-white world and think that that's how it is because it's not. But we don't need white authors saying, "You want more diversity? I'll come help you," and then start writing the book and invoking like a privilege in doing that. They don't understand. We don't need saving. We just need—*buy our books* and give them to children for gifts at Christmas, for birthdays and feel great about it. And read it yourself before you give it to them. It'll give you something to talk about.

So, that's my take on diversity. We are nowhere close to being evenly represented in the libraries. But we are making strides. We need to make more strides in the area of editors—more editors who can see our experiences and understand them as truth, instead of saying, "I'm just going to take your word for that because I don't really know. I'm not really sure if that's true or not. It's outside my scope so I'm just going to trust you on that."

Keys: Tell me about your roles in various organizations that are working to lift up authors of Color.

Allen: I'm on [*The Brown Bookshelf*](#) committee. I work with *Highlights*. I am the co-director of *Kindling Words East*, and I'm very interested in this *Texas Institute of Letters* which I was just

inducted into. I think that they have things going on. I'm a member of SCBWI. I get called on to do keynotes and teachings for them.

Keys: So, looking at the next 5 to 10 years, what is your prediction about some of the up-and-coming authors of Color?

Allen: That is a great question. I have high hopes, and the reason I do is because organizations are starting to provide a means for writers of Color to have an opportunity to learn the same way that white writers have learned in the past. They are raising money—they are giving money to these young writers that will pay for their travel, pay for their housing and their food as they come and hone their craft. Then editors' houses and literary agents will also come to that same place to see them and possibly give them a contract. Because of that, the future looks bright. There still needs to be a whole lot more done in different areas. But just knowing that this is something that is happening pleases me very much.

Conclusion

Crystal Allen gives life to her middle grades characters, and they, in turn, fortify the lives of readers through stories of relationship, of making mistakes and being okay, of humor that is so often found in pain, and of love—so much love. She offers her shoulders to upcoming authors of Color, networking to build assured spaces for diverse books that need to be on library shelves. And, as she continues to write and build new voices of characters that will come to life, she does what she loves most—she visits middle grades classrooms to recognize and enliven her readers' voices too. For more about Crystal and her books, visit her website at <https://crystalallenbooks.com/>.



Author Biography

Dixie K. Keyes, Ed.D., is a Professor of Education and Reading at Arkansas State University where she guides preservice teachers in teacher preparation coursework. She also teaches writing pedagogy, adolescent literacy, and critical literacy coursework at the graduate level. She taught middle and high school English Language Arts for 13 years and served as a secondary literacy coach before becoming a faculty member at Arkansas State. She directs the Arkansas Delta Writing Project and is a past-president of the Arkansas Council of Teachers of Language Arts. She writes poetry, blogs, and facilitates yoga and writing series in her local community. She can be reached at dkeyes@astate.edu.

YA Book Review

THREE JOURNEYS TO A BETTER LIFE: *REFUGEE* BY ALAN GRATZ

Payton Dearmont
Wichita State University

Alan Gratz's young adult novel *Refugee* (2017) intertwines the stories of three young children on the harrowing journey of survival to create a better life for not only themselves, but their friends and families. Imaginative details, heart-wrenching realities, and timeless emotion come together to create a world that tells the stories of refugees, both past and present. It earns its place on a classroom library's shelf by revealing the trials and tribulations that many refugees endure to embrace opportunity.

Josef (age 12), Isabel (age 11), and Mahmoud (age 12), all share the same experience of having to flee their homeland in search for a better life. Josef is a young Jewish boy who lives in 1930's Nazi Germany. When he is told he must leave Germany in the next fourteen days, Josef's father decides to take his family on the *St. Louis* a ship bound for Cuba.

While Josef and his family yearn to gain entry to pre-World War II Cuba, Isabel and her family yearn to leave the country in 1994. Isabel sells her prized trumpet for gasoline and sets off in a raft to cross the ocean from Cuba to Miami. Isabel is joined by her best friend Luis and his family, her father, grandfather, pregnant mother, and unborn brother on the tumultuous journey across the Atlantic. Josef and Isabel's stories are connected, and both feature the hope of *mañana*. Unlike Josef's, Isabel's journey is darkened by the tragic death of Luis just miles from the freedom of Miami.

In Syria in 2015, Mahmoud's story is one that has recently been depicted in mainstream media. He and his family flee Syria for the safety of Germany, an interesting juxtaposition to Josef and his journey. Mahmoud is forced to mature quickly due to the severe nature of his pilgrimage and the loss of his sister Hana. Mahmoud wishes to be invisible, and the horrors he witnesses during his trek through Europe create an interesting relationship between childhood and adulthood, shining a light on the realities of children harmed by war.

I enjoyed this novel. Admittedly, it made me cry several times. While I rooted for a happy ending, instead it was bittersweet but realistic. I think the thing I liked most about the novel was the fact that the characters' stories were all intertwined, not just because they were refugees, but because Gratz created their stories so that they aligned geographically and historically. For instance, Isabel's Cuban grandpa denies haven to the *St. Louis*, thus denying sanctuary to Josef's family.

I strongly believe that this book belongs in both a middle and high school classroom and should be taught within an English language arts classroom. It opens a new dialogue, not only for those experiencing this world for the first time but also to those who have been affected by a

journey of immigration. As a student, I read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and I feel that *Refugee*, while fiction, holds the same importance as the real-life memoir and should be an option for the school's curriculum. If not part of the curriculum, I think that it would be a perfect independent reading choice for students who are interested in refugees, World War II, or history.

Author Biography

Payton Dearmont is a junior at Wichita State University studying Secondary English Education and Spanish, in the accelerated Spanish master's program. She is also a part of the Beta Chi chapter of Gamma Phi Beta and serves as the president during the Spring and Fall 2022 semesters. This Panhellenic organization has helped her connect with the Wichita community through Gamma Phi Beta's International Philanthropy, Girls on the Run, and their local philanthropy, Heartspring, a school and resource for children with special needs and their families. When not at work or school, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends, reading, playing with her two dogs, and traveling. After graduation, Payton plans to continue her education by pursuing a master's degree and combine her love for Spanish, teaching, and traveling by teaching in a foreign Spanish-speaking country. She can be reached at pgdearmont@shocklers.wichita.edu.



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WING IT

Catherine Green
Mulvane High School

Inspired by our class reading of Macbeth

I should have planned my lesson last night.
There would have been a time for such a word:
tomorrow ... and tomorrow; and today
creeps forth the steady feeling of regret
of half-baked plans.

And all my yesterdays have been spent
lighting the way to dead ends,
 to confusing instructions,
 to misplaced slides,
 to spelling mistakes (in an English class?!),
to crystal clear hindsight:
if you don't know what's happening, how are they supposed to?

Out, out—that stubborn haze,
like a walking shadow of doubt, that plays at organization
and then plays no more. This is a tale,
told by an idiot, full of improvised bullshit and 6am plans
signifying ... growth?

There's only so much self-pity I can engage in.
It's time to stop up the access and passage to remorse.
 What have I learned from procrastination?
 From going green and pale at the mountain of delayed responsibility?
Well ... to do it better; to sharpen the keen edge of desperation and triumph into feathers
and to wing it even harder.

“Spirits, make thick my blood. Take my milk for gall.”
The words take hold of my choked arts and teach them to kick.
Beating out the rhythm, I find the courage to fly.
A chicken-feathered mockery—a rushed Icarus—
yet the chaos makes me lion-mettled, proud, and resolute.

Now, no man of woman born can break my stride—
my method, bear-like, fights the course:

1. Look not so pale.
2. Best it were done quickly.
3. Buy the golden opinions of others.

“Screw your courage
to the sticking place
and you
will not
fail.”

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Author Biography

Catherine Green is a recently graduated secondary English teacher from Wichita State University about to begin her first year of teaching. Her work often focuses on connecting experiences from her life as a student to reflections on the best practices implemented by teachers. Catherine comes from Wellington, Kansas, and claims Wichita as her home. To read more of her work, view her blog at <https://leanmeanmsgreenmachine.blogspot.com>. She can be reached by email at catherinegreen0000@gmail.com.



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YA Book Review

A RELATABLE SEASON

Marissa Dick

Pittsburg State University

No Ordinary Season by James V. Jacobs (2017) is an enjoyable, realistic depiction of the life of a devoted high school cross country runner. As a cross country athlete who now competes at the collegiate level, I was ecstatic to read a book about the challenges and tribulations the main character, Cassie Garnet, faces in her senior year of cross country competition. I loved the details that the author included about the day leading up to the race and the race itself. For example, Cassie had to adapt and make quick decisions during her races with the intention of beating highly competitive runners. It brought back all the feelings of mental and physical pain that I have had to deal with before and during races.

Additionally, I am a big romance fan, so reading about the small-town Indiana romance between Cassie and River Bend High's star basketball player Jake Nader added a spicy subplot to the story.

This book would appeal to secondary school readers because the characters face many of the same challenges that students face today such as bullying, competition, family conflict, and relationship issues.

This book could be included in a course curriculum to teach or encourage students to stand up for what they believe in or who they believe in as well as to argue that everyone deserves to be treated equally. Specifically, the new coach, Charna Rothstein Simon—or C.R. Simon—had to overcome prejudice because she is Jewish and therefore is an outcast in this small town. She overcomes adversity, building her relationship with Cassie, as well as the rest of her team, ultimately showing readers the positive, life-altering impact a coach-athlete relationship can have on both a team and individuals.

If readers are uncomfortable about the issues of discrimination, an alternative would be to read the history of Jessie Owen's triumph in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, when he proved to the Nazis that they are not the master race.

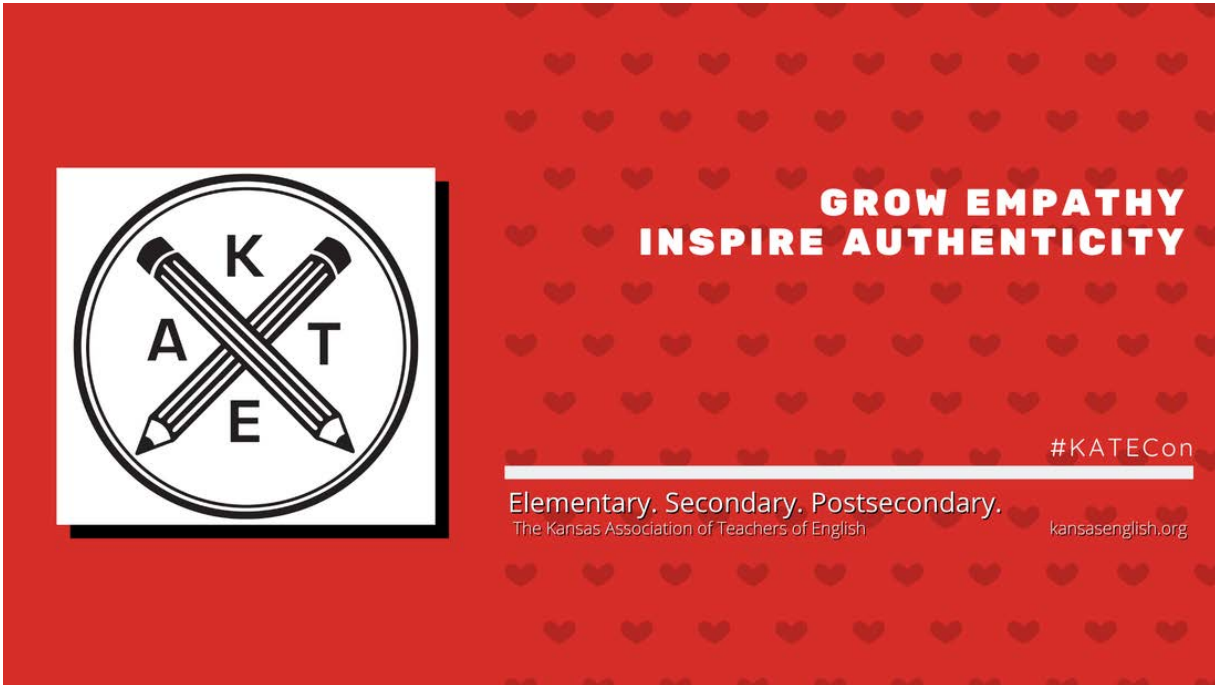
My favorite thing about this book, besides the competition aspect, is the connections made on the team. Initially, the girls lacked a coach who could motivate them to care for their sport or the team. Coach Simon sees their potential and makes them work to realize it. Additionally, besides my need for competition, I love the family I have created with my coaches and teammates. Likewise, Coach Simon creates a family with Cassie and her teammates.

While *No Ordinary Season* is particularly relatable to any person who has ever run cross country, I definitely recommend this book to anyone, not just runners, because it ranges across diverse topics such as athletic competition, and coach-athlete relationships and high school romances that would appeal to many young adult readers.

Author Biography

Marissa Dick is from Peculiar, MO, and went to Raymore-Peculiar High School. She was awarded a scholarship to run cross country and track at Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, KS. She is

currently a sophomore majoring in communication with an emphasis in media production. She could see herself potentially working in social media production and doing videography on the side. She can be reached at mdick@gus.pittstate.edu.



Kansas Association of Teachers of English Mission

- To provide a forum for dialogue and collegiality among Kansas teachers of English language arts, pre-kindergarten through post-secondary
- To provide leadership and direction for instruction, curriculum planning, and assessment in English language arts
- To serve as a vehicle for encouraging and highlighting students and professional writing in Kansas
- To increase public awareness of current theory and practice on issues of literacy
- To serve as a liaison between the community and schools on matters pertaining to literacy and language use
- To cooperate with other professional organizations and agencies throughout the state and nation in order to achieve common goals through political action
- To conduct, support, and distribute current research and scholarship in English language arts and to serve as a clearinghouse for information relating to English language arts
- To initiate and continue dialogue among Kansas teachers for the integration and application of language arts in all curricular areas

TEACHING TIPS

Beth Gulley, Column Editor

Welcome to the inaugural Teaching Tips column in *Kansas English*. This is a place where innovative educators from all levels of instruction may share brief (250-500 word) teaching strategies. We hope readers will draw inspiration from the ideas presented here, adapt them, and later share their own suggestions for meaningful classroom activities.

This column is inspired by Atul Gawande’s book *Better*, in which he makes five suggestions for being a positive deviant. Among the suggestions is to write something no matter how brief. In fact, Gawande lauds the publication of “fragments” of science. He contends, “by soliciting modest contributions from the many, we have produced a store of collective know-how with far greater power than any individual could have achieved” (Gawande, 2007, pp. 255-256). The same could be said for snapshots of what works well inside classrooms. By soliciting brief pieces, we hope to encourage more teachers to write and share their teaching highlights with others. In this way, we hope to add to the collective understanding of what happens in classrooms today.

In this column, the four pieces point to ways teachers can foster student engagement and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. Amanda Preston highlights a partnership between elementary school students who write stories and a high school drama class that turns the stories into plays they bring back and perform for the elementary school. April Pameticky shares how she uses sticky notes to foster authentic student discussions. Maureen Fitzpatrick borrows a mode of inquiry from botany to engage literature students in story worlds. Finally, Shannon Carriger prompts students to propose their own projects and generate their own rubrics.

In the next column, we hope to include even more excellent teaching snippets. We hope, dear reader, that you will consider contributing your great ideas here as well.

Reference

Gawande, A. (2007). *Better: A surgeon’s notes on performance*. Picador.

Teaching Tip: Bring Stories to Life on Stage

Amanda Preston

Wolf Creek Elementary, Spring Hill, Kansas

I imagine that almost every author dreams of the day when their writing comes alive as a published text. How exciting it must be to see the carefully considered words flow across the page, for a reader to bring the story into reality! It's like magic! This same magical excitement proves true for student authors. Kids love creating stories and imagining them come to life. Here is an example of how some elementary students had the opportunity to bring their stories off the page and right onto center stage!

Fourth and fifth grade students participated in an optional writing contest. Students worked for a couple of months developing a story, conferencing with a teacher to make improvements, and creating a final draft. Once completed, judges scored the stories based on a rubric. This was a pretty typical student writing contest.

But, the winning prize was very different. After the judges had finished scoring, the top stories were sent over to the drama department at the local high school. Now, these high school thespians took the stories and turned each of them into a play. Each play was assigned a senior student to be the director. The director and the rest of the cast worked to develop the characters, plan the blocking, create the costumes, and more. They rehearsed for a few weeks. Then, they brought their plays to the elementary school to perform in front of students.

This was the authors' moment in the spotlight! They were introduced before their plays began. They had a moment to explain how they got the idea for their stories and what it was like to move through the writing process. Then, the actors performed the plays. Afterwards, the authors reflected on whether or not the plays stayed true to what they had imagined. They shared what it felt like to see their stories come to life—literally!

This event really brought excitement to the writing process. Students were enthralled by seeing a peer's story come to life. It inspired them to join the contest the following year, to perhaps see their story up on stage. It also created an amazing partnership between the elementary students and the high school drama department. It proved that just like in the publishing world, it takes many hands to bring an author's story to life! And the end result was magical!

Author Biography

Amanda Preston is an elementary school librarian in Spring Hill, Kansas, and a member of the Flint Hills Writing Project. She enjoys combining her love of books and writing together to inspire her students. She can be reached at prestona@usd230.org.

Teaching Tip: Use Sticky-Notes to Generate Better Inquiry for Better Class Discussions

April Pameticky

Wichita East High School, Wichita, Kansas

When I was a first-year teacher, I relied heavily on pre-generated questions, either directly from the curriculum or from study guides. I wanted the students to have quality conversations and class discussions, but I didn't trust myself to get students where I wanted them to go without the assistance of well-written questions. I spent a great deal of time categorizing questions as text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text; or determining that some questions weren't worth asking because they were only Costa's Level 1 (RIGHT THERE) questions.

I often found myself in painfully silent rooms as students tried to digest what my question was asking. I would even ask leading questions with sentence stem starters ... assuming that the fill-in-the-blank answer was obvious.

It wasn't obvious.

The painful silence had kids forcefully staring down or wincing when they met my gaze.

I was making some very important errors:

- 1) I assumed if they didn't answer the question, they didn't understand the question.
- 2) I assumed that my interpretation OR the most common interpretation was the only VALID interpretation of the story.
- 3) I assumed that my students didn't understand basic elements of the story.
- 4) I assumed that if they didn't *ask* any questions, they didn't *have* any questions.

I instituted a practice when I taught middle school that has translated very nicely to my high school classroom. All students get a sticky note and can ask *any* question they want about the text. All students HAVE to generate a question—but I don't tell them it has to be a certain level or a certain type. At this stage, I'm not teaching levels of inquiry, although later that might be an additional element. It's a ticket out at the bell or a transition activity to hang the sticky-note.

I then take those questions and curate them. Questions that directly relate to some part of the plot that have confused readers get addressed whole-class. How can we go deep if we still have questions related to *who* did *what*? Then those questions that do dig deeper, that do bring up some interesting elements, those are brought to the discussion where I step back (I do Socratic Circles, World Café Rotations, Padlet Discussions, etc.). I have found that if I let my students guide our discussions, there is far more buy-in and participation. Students get excited to hear their questions. Some will verbally claim them; "That's mine!" Others will shyly come up later and thank me for using their questions.

I can do a number of informal assessments and checks-for-understanding this way. The results have meant validating student thinking and interpretations of things. It has also meant that I've broadened my own understandings of stories. I've allowed students to challenge stories and to learn to value the questioning process.

Author Biography

April Pameticky lives and works in Wichita, Kansas. When not busy raising two children with her husband, she's grading papers for her high school students, or upon that rare occasion, writing a line or two of poetry. She can be reached at apameticky@usd259.net.

Teaching Tip: Implement INIWIRMO Journals

Maureen Fitzpatrick

Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas

With our college largely online in the fall of 2020, one of our suddenly lab-less botany professors sent his students into their yards and neighborhoods for field work. Their mission was to find and journal about the plants around them using a journaling style popular in nature studies programs—INIWIRMO journaling. INIWIRMO—an acronym for *I notice, I wonder, It reminds me of*—engages observers in close examination of their natural “texts” and encourages curiosity. It asks them to look closely at or even to sketch out important details, to speculate on the meaning or significance of what they noticed, and finally to make a connection between their specimen and the wider world. As my colleague showed us sample pages from his students’ nature journals, I began revising my plans for a course on storyworld literature I was teaching that term. My colleague’s students had taken INIWIRMO journals into their back yard; mine would take them to Middle Earth.

The results were amazing. When students posted their INIWIRMO journals to discussion boards after each assigned reading, these three prompts set off an explosion of conversation. Each of the students had noticed something different, so the discussions were wide-ranging. Each of the students’ wonderings raised distinct ideas about character motivations or the story’s next chapter that engaged their classmates. Each of the personal associations—whether the student had been reminded of a personal event or another story they had read or seen—linked them to classmates with similar experiences and deepened their connection to the text.

The prompts were simple for students to grasp, and the responses were engaging to read; indeed, the INIWIRMO journals had worked so well in the literature class, I looked at my composition classes for readings students had struggled to engage with. In composition section for healthcare-related professions, students had been struggling to connect to many of the essays in *Disability/ Visibility*, a collection of first-person writings about living with disabilities. The essays are compelling but outside of many of the students’ experience—personal essays on being deaf inside the prison system, reflections on the challenges of designing clothing for clients with a variety of disabilities, the story of the moment one woman stopped looking for a cure for a painful condition. I had assigned the students to select an essay from the book and expand on the theme. I wanted to discourage students from selecting an essay based only on its title or length and encourage students to read multiple selections, yet I didn’t want to burden the students with writing multiple summaries of essays they were not actually interested in. Instead, I asked students to submit a INIWIRMO reflection on each of their three top contenders. The INIWIRMO entries were not only faster assignments for them to complete (and for me to grade), but the *wondering* and reflection on what it *reminded them of* engaged them in the materials in a way that led them to further explorations of the essay’s theme.

Author Biography

Maureen Fitzpatrick has taught English at Johnson County Community College since 1993. She teaches a variety of writing classes and the occasional literature course. She can be reached at mfitzpat@jccc.edu.

Teaching Tip: Try a Student Proposed Project and Rubric

Shannon Carriger

Gardner Edgerton High School

One common struggle in Language Arts classes is the buy-in necessary for a student to create meaningful work. Often a blanket prompt is offered on a singular topic—character development in *The Scarlet Letter* for instance—and then the teacher must grade up to a hundred essays on the same topic that may be, depending on the student’s level of buy in, less than inspired.

One way to mitigate this is to have students propose their own project and create their own rubric for a writing assignment. Make a choice bank listing six to ten skills you’ve been teaching and allow them to choose the three to five they’d like to have assessed. I always include editing as the non-negotiable criterion for all students. This is a reminder that work must be polished and complete to be considered for a grade.

In an advanced Creative Writing class, this worked well recently when students were working on projects in three different genres: poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction. Because they had the freedom to work in the genre of their choice, and because they planned and proposed their own projects, they had ownership over what was evaluated for a grade. For the first time in years, all projects were turned in on time, and the grades were higher on average due to the student sense of agency in the decision-making process around how the work was assessed.

Author Biography

Shannon Carriger is a writer and career educator currently teaching at Gardner Edgerton High School. Her chapbook, *Deep Inside that Rounded World*, was published by Finishing Line Press in October 2020, and she blogs at www.shannoncarriger.com. She makes her home in Ottawa, KS, with her poet-professor husband and their ever-evolving book and record collections. She can be reached at skcarriger@gmail.com.



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“Good Job, Jack”

A Tribute to Dr. Bushman

John H. Bushman

1940 - 2020



The Introduction

Kevin Kienholz

Emporia State University

Prof. John (Jack) H. Bushman was a genuine difference maker in the lives of young readers and writers across the state of Kansas and well beyond the borders of the Sunflower State for the past sixty years. The same could be said for so many of the students who ended up in his college classrooms and for the colleagues who were fortunate enough to work with him over the years. Jack had a positive influence on numerous people's lives in the areas of reading and writing, and he left an important legacy in the state and beyond because of his important work in literacy and especially young adult literature. The following tributes will highlight some of the many ways in which Prof. Bushman's legacy continues to impact the work and the lives of his former students, colleagues, and peers—and these stories will serve to honor the work that he did both in and outside of the classroom.

Before he became “Prof. Bushman,” Jack taught freshman English language arts at Ottawa High School from 1961 to 1965. He moved from the high school to Ottawa University, where he taught until 1971. It was in 1971 that he earned his PhD from the University of Illinois (having previously earned a bachelor's degree from Ottawa University and a master's degree from the University of Kansas), and it was at that time that he made the move to the faculty of KU, where he ultimately became a member of the Department of Teaching and Leadership in the School of Education. He retired from KU in 2005.

In the midst of Jack's teaching career in the classroom, in 1980 he founded the Writing Conference, Inc., a non-profit organization with the mission of improving the writing and reading skills of young people. For decades under Prof. Bushman's direction, the Conference sponsored important programs such as the Literature Festival, the Heartland Recommendations, and the Writer's Slate. Jack also contributed to the common good by serving as member of the Ottawa Board of Education for twelve years. His outstanding service and contributions to the profession were recognized in numerous ways over the years, including through NCTE's Edwin M. Hopkins *English Journal* Award (honorable mention, 1998) as well as the Ned N. Fleming Trust Award for Outstanding Classroom Teaching (KU, 2000). Again and again, Jack impacted the field in significant and lasting ways throughout his career, in both the classroom and throughout his community.

Of course, Jack did more than just *encourage* others to lead a life filled with books and pages filled with writing—he led by example. According to Jack's son Greg, Prof. Bushman was a voracious reader himself. Greg recalled that publishing companies were always sending Jack books for review, so he was constantly reading something. He literary tastes carried over into the theater, as well, and Prof. Bushman loved to direct plays throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s. He also wrote and published a great deal, including his work as the co-author of *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom*, among other books.

In leading by example, though, many people were influenced and nudged and swayed and ultimately influenced into the teaching field themselves, and Greg noted that one of the things Prof. Bushman loved seeing was where his former students ended up teaching. Many of Prof. Bushman's former students stayed in contact with him over the years, and he ended up collaborating with them—a turn of events which very much pleased him. It was, of course, another sign of the difference he was making in the paths that the lives of his students were taking.

After an enormously influential career in the field of education in the state of Kansas, Prof. Jack Bushman passed away on December 8, 2020. His legacy continues in the work of his many

former students and colleagues, as well as the many young readers and writers who participated in the writing contests and literature festivals sponsored by the Writing Conference over the past nearly thirty years. It is appropriate to note here that one of Prof. Bushman's favorite poems was Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," a framed copy of which he had hanging on one of his walls. This Frost poem seems like a particularly appropriate selection to consider for this occasion, since it provides readers the opportunity to consider those moments that make important differences in people's lives, and the following tributes will highlight some of the many ways in which the work, the life, and the legacy of Prof. Bushman will continue to make important differences in the lives of Kansas readers, writers, and teachers in the years to come.

The Obituary

Services for John (Jack) H. Bushman, (80), Ottawa will be at the Westminster Presbyterian Church, 401 W. 13th, Ottawa Kansas, on Monday December 14, at 1:00 PM. For those unable to attend, services will be livestreamed through the Lamb-Roberts-Price Funeral Home Facebook page. His body was donated to the University of Kansas Medical Center. He died December 8, 2020.

Jack was born June 3, 1940, in Franklin, New Hampshire, to Harry and Gladys Bushman. After graduating high school, he moved to Ottawa, Kansas, to attend Ottawa University.

Jack was a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Teaching and Leadership in the School of Education at KU. He taught at KU from 1971 until his retirement in 2005. He received his bachelor's degree in 1962 from Ottawa University; his master's degree from KU in 1966 and his PhD from the University of Illinois in 1971. He also taught 9th grade English in the Ottawa Public Schools from 1961 to 1965; he was a Professor of English at Ottawa University from 1965 until 1971.

Jack was Director of the Writing Conference, Inc., a non-profit organization which he created in 1980 and was Director until 2018. The organization's mission was to reduce illiteracy by improving writing and reading skills of young people. He was also a member of the USD 290 Ottawa Board of Education for 12 years. He received honorable mention for the Edwin M. Hopkins English Journal Award (NCTE, 1998) and the Ned N. Fleming Trust Award for Outstanding Classroom Teaching (KU, 2000). He was a member of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN).

He is survived by his three children: Greg (56), Ellen (47), Eric (36), one brother, Clayt, Franklin, NH; and two grandchildren, Samantha (16), Kendall (10).

Obituary used with permission of Lamb-Roberts-Price Funeral Home

The Call

Dear _____,

I wonder if you know that Dr. John Bushman, who led the LitFest for many years, passed away in December of 2020. I attach a copy of his obituary in case you have not read it.

I am editing a special section honoring him in *Kansas English*, 2022. My working title is "Good Job, Jack." It is intended to be a collection of eulogistic tributes anecdotally explaining or narrating our relationship with Dr. Bushman as well as his personal, positive influence on us.

I wonder if you might be willing to contribute a few pages to this effort.

If so, then please know that a negotiable deadline is January 2022.

As always, I look forward to reading from you.

John Franklin

The Responders

[Jill Adams](#)
[Susan Alexander](#)
[Chris Crutcher](#)
[Sharon M. Draper](#)
[Steven B. Frank](#)
[John Franklin](#)
[F. Todd Goodson](#)
[April Hawkins](#)
[Lisa Hazlett](#)
[Kimberly Willis Holt](#)
[Kevin Kienholz](#)
[Steve Loe](#)
[Suzanne Myers](#)
[Rodman Philbrick](#)
[Robert Sailer](#)
[Barbara Stuber](#)

Their Words

Jill Adams

I have thought a lot about how to honor Dr. Bushman. Perhaps too much. Through these reflections, I realize that I honor Dr. B in my teaching each day.

All I Need to Know about Teaching, I Learned from Dr. Jack Bushman

Know what you're talking about. Be informed—use references to make your point.

Embrace the language arts: Reading, Writing, Thinking, Listening, and Thinking...all together in a unit. Weave it all together.

Use the power of the mini lesson. Fifteen minutes can pack a mighty instructional punch.

Enjoy the magic of young adult literature. Many life lessons can be gained through these treasures.

Know when to open your classroom door and also when to shut it. Open your door to collaboration and to invite others in but also be confident enough to adjust things for your students.

Give your students opportunities to extend their learning. Offer chances to explore and discover on their own.

Get fired up. Let passion guide your decision making.

Do what's best for kids. Above all, this is what it's all about.

So there it is. These are decisions that I make on a daily basis for my students. I have been thinking a lot about how Jack would think this school year is going...I believe he would agree with my ideas about grace. It's been a tough two years...continue to give our students and ourselves grace, everyone.

Thanks for all of the invaluable lessons, Jack. I wouldn't be in year 25 of teaching without them or you.

Dr. Jill Adams,
MSed, University of Kansas 1999
PhD, University of Kansas, 2005

Susan Alexander

In his autobiography *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907, Ch. 20), Adams wrote, “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” Truer words couldn’t be written about the influence of Jack Bushman. In his undergraduate language arts methods course, he completely changed the way I looked at teaching English Language Arts, and, therefore, the way I taught my secondary English classes. As my advisor and professor for many of my masters’ courses, he again gave me new insights into how to further make literature and writing come alive for students. I felt much honored over the years for him to have sent me twenty-one student teachers. And, finally, I had the privilege of being his last doctoral student and now teach future teachers at the university level. One can only imagine the number of students, teachers, and future teachers he has influenced and how far and long that influence will live on. Well done, Jack.

Dr. Susan L. Alexander
Washburn University

Chris Crutcher

John Bushman

There are few young adult authors writing from the early 1980s through the mid-2010s who aren't familiar with The Writing Conference at the University of Kansas and its godfather Jack Bushman. I met Jack in the mid-1980s when he invited me to present at The Conference. I was a relatively new writer then, always pleasantly surprised when my work was recognized by someone from that alien planet of Academia, as well as a little apprehensive that I might be asked some question about my relationship with "the classics."

My answer would have been short.

But Jack Bushman was a whole different guy from the professorial stereotype floating around in my oft-neglected frontal lobe. He was a champion for books kids would actually *read*. He understood most needed a little push in the right direction, but was plenty intolerant with educators who believed that "kids today" don't want to—or can't—read. His quick comeback to that was, "You're not giving them the right books." At dinner, the night before my first Writer's Conference, he told me he had nothing against the classics, but that most couldn't pull an emotional response from a middle- or high school reader; that they had to be *explained*, and in some cases read out loud by the teacher, which took away any *punch* they might have had back in the day when they were written. Our conversation brought back my high school experiences with Shakespeare and Dickens and whoever the hell wrote *Beowulf*. My English teacher tried to sell those books by saying they had as much sex and violence mystery as any of the more current, popular fare. I didn't have a great editing function between my brain and my mouth, but I *did* manage to keep from saying aloud, "Hey, if it doesn't give me a throbbing chubby, it ain't sexy."

A line like that would have been far too indelicate for Jack to utter, but in short order, I knew we were like-minded in that regard (though I would later learn that if the two of us were to attend a national political convention prior to any given presidential election in the same year, there'd be *no* chance we'd run into each other).

It took me no time to realize that this guy knew his books, and he had a great sense of the chaotic human development frontier that is adolescence. He saw the power of story and he knew *connection* to story was the pathway to creating lifelong readers.

Jack could be serious or funny or both; always a little gruff, and I'm guessing a pretty demanding prof. I told him once that, had I been his student, and *really* busted my butt in his class, I might have pulled a C+. After I said it, I remember thinking, "I'll bet he doesn't give pluses."

I think the measure of a person's value in his or her chosen career can be measured by treasures left behind. Even today, I meet an astonishing number of educators who studied under Jack, or studied under somebody who studied under Jack; or were influenced in one way or another by his take-no-prisoners battle to get kids reading.

Word has it that we all die twice; once when we take our last breath, and again when the last person mentions our name. I've got a feeling Jack Bushman is going to be around for a while.

Sharon M. Draper

My Memories of Jack Bushman

When I first met Jack, I'd never heard of John Bushman, never heard of the Writing Conference, and I'd never been to Kansas! "Come to the heart of the world," he told me one day at one of the many conferences we used to have. And so, one day, I think it might have been 2007, I did! I had been given the honor of the Heartland Award. The name is appropriate because Kansas is in the heart of this country, and Jack, even though he would never admit it, was the heart of the conference.

I had attended several conferences and conventions by that time, but I was still a newbie at travel. Kansas was new for me, but I looked forward to the challenge. At the Literature Conference, I know everyone remembers the bustling crowds of excited teachers and media specialists. The whole event was about books and reading and literature and sharing—I felt so much at home. It was truly awesome.

And then there were the children—oh, those kids! Jack had single-handedly energized a group of young people who, because they were teenagers, cared about very little except for the color of their fingernail polish or the latest music online. But Jack had somehow managed to energize them with his superpower—his love of books and reading literature! Those who had been there before knew what to expect. The new ones learned quickly. In just a short time, he had created a throng of young people *excited about books and authors!* Jack bustled around, chatting with kids and parents, greeting friends and

colleagues, solving issues from anyone who had a question, and managing it all like he was the father of us all—the guy who wanted to make absolutely certain that everything was perfect.

From Jack Bushman, I learned how to organize, prioritize, and strategize. I also learned I never wanted to run a conference! 😊 But Jack breathed it in and out like oxygen, and we all floated on the power of his energy and strength.

So, from that point on, whenever Jack said, “Come to Kansas!” that’s what I did! One year, we did an event called O-Town Reads. Everyone in Ottawa, Kansas, had read one of my books—children in the classrooms, teachers, parents, even grocery store clerks and pharmacists and the serving staff at local restaurants. Because Jack had decided that Ottawa was going to read, that’s what they did. It was a great event—the whole town felt a sense of community because of books, because of sharing, and because of John Bushman.

Jack and I shared meals together, exchanged family stories, and tossed back and forth ideas about books and stories over green beans and corn on the cob. I will always treasure his wisdom, his humor, and his love for all literature.

He was the strength and the guiding light for not just the Literature Conference, but for me personally, a young author who was given the opportunity to share my stories with others.

I will always remember his smile and his laughter.

Thank you, John Bushman, for being a guiding light to the community, the world, and to me.

Steven B. Frank

I never met Jack Bushman, but I walked across the bridge he built. In 2019 I was invited to be a guest author at the Washburn Literature Festival, Jack’s brainchild, a nexus of students & teachers, readers & writers, all united by a passion for books. The festival pulled me out of my classroom (I teach 6th grade) and my closet (the hut where I write) and into the company of fellow teachers, writers, and young readers. Because of Jack, I got to hear Professor John Franklin tell me more about the structure of my middle grade novel *Class Action* than I had ever consciously thought about. Because of Jack, I got to meet Bob Sallier, who graciously invited me to attend. Because of Jack, I got to meet a literary idol of mine, Gary D. Schmidt, with whom I shared the speakers’ stage that day and an inspiring car ride at the Festival’s end. And because of Jack, I was reminded of the real reason I squeeze myself into a small space and try to build a world of words: I got to meet young readers without whom children’s and YA authors write into the void, but with whom we build bridges of our own paved in humor, action, emotion, and ideas. How great that we came together in the center of America, bonded by perhaps the one object that can help a diverse nation to cohere: the book. Thank you, Jack, for your vision. May your Festival and your memory endure.

John Franklin

A Measure of a Man

There are very few people for whom I would undertake an enterprise as daunting as this one. John Bushman is on that list.

I differ from other contributors to this Special Section. Many of them are Jack's students; others are writers. In contrast, I am, rather, a colleague.

I met Jack not in his classroom, not at the YA Literature Festival but at KATE, at our annual conference in Wichita where he steadfastly manned a table for The Writing Conference, Inc. One morning I noticed his professorial uniform—coat, tie, comfortable shoes—and struck up a conversation while perusing his wares.

I wasn't interested so much in the books written by his students—though off-and-on through the years I bought a shelf full of their publications for The Writing Center at Pitt State, where once-upon-a-time English Ed majors tutored for course credit.

Instead, I was interested in his book *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom*, which I found refreshing in its unabashed agenda: adolescents will read if you offer them books that attract and maintain their interest. Among his resources, Dr. Bushman provided lists of books with notes and justification for using them in an English classroom. Rock solid adolescent psychology coupled with basic reading theory extended his scholarship, which was wonderfully accessible to English majors.

I taught his book in its various editions for years, and I began to anticipate meeting Jack at KATE each year where I could pick this professor-author's brain. One year he changed my life by inviting me to join a committee he created: The Heartland Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature, at that time a group of readers tasked with the mission of nominating a list of YA titles for students who would vote for their favorite book. Dr. Bushman was quite proud of the Heartland being selected by middle-and-secondary school students. The book's writer was featured as a speaker at the Lit Fest attended by hundreds and hundreds of their book's readers. The event was a fanfest filled with love for young adult literature.

As a reader who helped shorten the list from three dozen-or-so titles to a more manageable ten, I felt that I had joined a club. As a club member who taught YAL to English Ed majors, as a tenure-earning professor who discussed Jack's book and how to teach it with the man himself, I felt downright collegial.

Collegiality expanded exponentially when Dr. Bushman invited me to edit *The Writers' Slate*, a periodical publication of The Writing Conference (an egotistical aside: the logo I designed—fountain pen poised above the pages of an open journal—is based upon the pen with which I write the first draft of this essay—a medium-point, 18k gold-nibbed Parker Duofold. Jack, I believe, deserves no less than to be remembered by words written with gold.). I served as editor for five years, corresponding with student-writers and their teachers around the world.

When Dr. Bushman retired, the Award morphed into The Heartland Committee to Promote Lifelong Reading, over which he presided, it seemed, forever.

But, forever doesn't last forever.

When a plan of succession was eventually proposed and effected by his students, I decided to pitch the idea of a *festschrift* in his honor.

Sadly, he passed before I could launch the project, which has evolved into the *Kansas English* Special Section that you are reading (here I spotlight Katie Cramer—Editor

extraordinaire—herself an English Ed professor who is undoubtedly a nascent Bushman—who supported the project from the get-go.)

I did not intend to edit this homage.

I thought that honor should go to one of his students.

However, while proffering the opportunity to Heartland Committee members, what I discovered is that as a teacher, Dr. Bushman’s relationship with his students is so powerful, so emotional, that grief-stricken as they are by his death, they simply could not do it.

The pain of our loss was so greatly heartfelt by so many that I can summarize their collective response to my offer in four words, followed by my parenthetical sympathy: “I can’t do this. (It hurts too much).”

His students’ response leads me to conclude:

If pain be a measure of loss, then Dr. Bushman’s passing is beyond measure.

If influence be a measure of success, then Dr. Bushman’s legacy is beyond measure.

If a measure of a man be respect, then our respect for Dr. Bushman is beyond measure.

You did a good job, Jack.

F. Todd Goodson

I Guess That’s One Way to Do It

It was always hard to explain The Writing Conference, Inc.

In November of 1995 Ted Fabiano and I spent most of the NCTE conference standing in the exhibit hall, helping Jack market his various products to the profession at large. I recall several colleagues and acquaintances coming by the booth, and the interaction followed a certain pattern.

First it was, “Jack! What are you doing here?”

Then Ted and I watched as our guests looked at the various products on display—from the spiral bound publications, through the student journal, to the special events. One-by-one, we watched as the visitors attempted to make The Writing Conference, Inc. fit into their existing structures for publishing and staff development. We counted four ways in which colleagues sought to fit our entity into their prior knowledge.

One, we know all about funded programs. The National Writing Project was a vital force in those days, and the English education community understood staff development and outreach programs funded by grant dollars.

No. The Writing Conference, Inc. was not a funded program.

Two, we all know about conferences and activities sponsored by professional organizations, and I watched a couple of visitors who tried, as hard as they could, to make The Writing Conference, Inc. into a state or regional professional association.

Sorry. No members. No dues.

Three, we all have experience with special events sponsored by our universities, and several visitors to the booth made the assumption this was a University of Kansas initiative. It's hard to blame them. Jack was a KU icon. Why wouldn't The Writing Conference, Inc. be a corporate product from the office of non-credit special programs?

Except no. Not only was The Writing Conference, Inc. not connected to the university, there was a solid red line between the two.

Finally, the next assumption was that it was about consulting. We all know of higher education faculty who do quite well consulting with K-12 systems, so that must be what is happening here. Jack is selling his wares on the in-service circuit.

The one conversation from my exhibit hall experience that I recall vividly was when my own undergraduate advisor, Ben Nelms, stopped by. Ben clicked down the possibilities I've outlined above, and when Jack finally explained in detail how The Writing Conference, Inc. was formally chartered as a non-profit corporation, unconnected with institutions or organizations, I watched Ben thinking through the possibilities. He stood silently for a bit, looked at me with a puzzled expression, and finally said, "I guess that's one way to do it."

I'll make two points here. The first is that every higher education colleague who came by that day, every other English education faculty member from around the country, left with something to think about. I have not a doubt in the world that people left that day thinking about the viability of Jack's model.

How much would that cost?

What kind of impact could it have?

What kinds of conflicts could it cause?

What's the payoff?

Could I do something like this?

My second point is that to my knowledge, no one has been able to replicate what Jack did with The Writing Conference, Inc.

What Jack did was bold and it was provocative. He was faced with systems that didn't do what he thought should be happening, so he created his own system. The tribute to Jack I would like to offer here is admiration for his unflinching dedication to the possibilities of secondary English and his unwillingness to compromise.

I left KU almost 30 years ago, but I'm indebted to Jack for most of my professional journey since that time. Mostly, he taught me to be devoted to what is right, that which isn't but should be, and work relentlessly toward those goals.

I will also confess to investing hours in thinking and planning and puzzling about how the structure of The Writing Conference, Inc. might be adapted. Just like all the curious people who visited the booth in 1995, I haven't been able to fit the non-profit concept into my own professional identity.

Nevertheless, Jack's accomplishment deserves at least a moment of admiration and probably a good deal more. When something is so far out of the box of professional practice, it is easy to shake our heads, say something like "I guess that's one way to do it" and move on without further consideration.

The Writing Conference, Inc. deserves further consideration. I don't think it's necessarily a good idea for every education professor to be running non-profit corporations out of renovated patio space in private homes the way Jack did, but I also don't think we have learned everything we can from his experience. He attempted to be a publisher of educational materials and texts and a student journal. He ran one of the more successful professional conferences of his day, and his literature festivals were epic. He even ran a student writing camp. And he did it all under the banner of his own governance structure that was borrowed from the way universities and professional organizations, and funding agencies work but in the end was something uniquely (and legally) his own.

I doubt if we will ever see something like The Writing Conference, Inc. again.

That is a shame.

It was indeed one way to do it.

April Hawkins

One of the most notable things about Dr. Bushman was the way that he brought communities of educators together to share, learn, and promote his mission of advancing literacy for young adults and creating lifelong readers. He believed that using current young adult literature was the key to achieving this goal. He accomplished this through his work with the nonprofit organization he created and dedicated much of his life to directing: The Writing Conference, Inc.

I still have the letter he sent to me in 1996 asking me to serve on a new committee he was forming called The Heartland Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. Through my participation in this committee, I was able to meet incredible authors who were leaders in young adult literature such as Robert Cormier, Sharon Draper, Will Hobbs, Gary Schmidt, and Cynthia Leitich Smith. I was able to collaborate with other educators who inspired me to constantly improve my own teaching.

I have seen first-hand the indelible impact that Dr. Bushman has made on many lives. One of the best language arts teachers whom I currently work with attended the Literature Festival as a high school student. She was impressed by reading *Thirteen Reasons Why* and then being able to meet author Jay Asher. This event helped lead her on her path to become a language arts teacher. Another impressive young teacher shared with me that she won a fiction writing contest sponsored by The Writing Conference, Inc., and it made such an impact on her life that she too became a middle school English teacher.

When I think of the lives and careers positively impacted by Jack, I am reminded of this quote by Neal Shusterman from his book, *Dread Locks*: “When you drop a pebble into a pond, ripples spread out, changing all the water in the pool. The ripples hit the shore and rebound, bumping into one another, breaking each other apart. In some small way, the pond is never the same again.”

Dr. Bushman did not drop a pebble into the pool.

He dropped a boulder.

And the rippling effect of his efforts to promote lifelong literacy has sent tsunamis throughout educational communities.

Thank you, Dr. Bushman.

Lisa Hazlett

John H. Bushman

In 1985 I arrived soaking wet to meet my doctoral advisor, Jack Bushman, having misjudged the distance from student parking to Bailey Hall along with presuming the light rain would continue. Jack greeted me by laughing at my appearance and continued laughing throughout our appointment. We immediately clicked with his desk sign saying *Illiterate? Write now for free help!* still making me snicker. Eric was in a stroller then, and after graduating in spring of 1989, I headed north to the University of South Dakota, planning to stay a few years.

It's 2021 and I'm still at USD, once the youngest (age 29) and least-experienced professor to senior faculty member, with this my 32nd year, shocking to realize. Jack taught his students to be academicians by being a superb one himself and throwing out perceptive Jack-ism's whenever eyes would narrow. He had a swell sense of humor, knew his stuff *completely*, expected excellence, and was never, ever satisfied, always pushing us toward the next goal a second after earning the first.

Before one's first class he hammered about comprehensive exams, then finishing coursework, proposals, and dissertations. After my defense he was flying to a conference; he ran from the room yelling, “Congratulations! Now get a job!” on the way to his car, never stopping.

When signing contracts, he immediately brought up P&T, and after receiving tenure letters he wanted the date we planned to go up for full professor. After full, he said we now had to reinvent ourselves, as there is no fuller and fullest professor, other than weight. Many of his Jack-ism's weren't fully understood at the time, and it wasn't until I was a professor myself that I realized they were **all** solid gold. Throughout my USD years I've continually heard Jack's voice and taught my students as he'd mentored me, marveling at how wonderfully effective he was as most Jackism's were during casual conversations. There are too many to count, but these particularly resonated:

1. While preparing for his 1990 writing conference, he gave me pencils to sharpen for folders. I did, thankful for an electric sharpener but also thinking an undergraduate work-study a better choice. Jack surely saw this on my too-expressive face, casually remarking that *each task is important, and all must be completed with excellence*. Point taken.
2. Best time saver ever: *fully copy a citation and its complete source, then double-check before returning the book or journal (Internet didn't exist then), as it takes three times longer to relocate—if still there*. True yet today.
3. When leaving for SD, he gave me the holy grail of recordkeeping:
 - *Save Everything with Your Name on It,*
 - *Keep A Record of Everything You Do, Regardless of How Minor,*
 - *Do Your Homework,* and
 - *Get a Planner and Use It*. Still works.
4. He also knew failures were held by most of us far longer than successes, but his *Made a Mistake? Offer no Excuses; Say I'm Sorry, State How the Problem Will Be Solved, Do It, and Move On* remains professional and elegant.
5. He had no time for anyone complaining about routine job tasks; I was whining about my grading, and he snapped, *"You assigned it; you grade it—it's your JOB."* Understood.
6. Hands down, my favorite is *Only the Little People Attend [Conference] Sessions*, i.e., professors should hold NCTE offices, serve on committees and be speakers, and it still makes me laugh every single time I'm at a conference.
 - Service is a job requirement, so naturally he gathered his advisees, found the reddest of red-eye plane tickets (*We need to leave at 3:30 a.m.!*) and off we went to NCTE. At the time, having us present at NCTE (and make contacts before graduation) was largely unprecedented, but Jack led instead of following.

There were so many more, of course, and after graduating multiple other invitations were continually offered as we went from students to colleagues. Jack wanted us to succeed, was proud of our accomplishments, and kept in touch with his advisees, all extended family.

I also smiled at his Christmas cards, always featuring cardinals and the first received, every year. I won't be opening one this December and can't say how much this hurts. I had always wondered if, or when, he would mention death in one of his pushes, but I suppose he showed us instead, a role model to the end. Still, when I enter professor-heaven (surely, it's an ivory tower) he'll be there, pointing to the next step (*Wings! You need to earn wings!*).

Jack believed in each of us before we did and when we didn't, and never, ever presumed failure was an option. He and his voice guided me throughout my career which is now, incredibly, ending. He was cherished and oh, so missed.

Lisa A. Hazlett
Professor of Secondary Education, University of South Dakota

Kimberly Willis Holt

Thank you for wanting to include me in your special eulogistic tribute to Dr. John Bushman. I think it's wonderful that you are doing this to honor him. Dr. Bushman is an example of the many unsung heroes of children's and young adult literature who keep books and their authors alive by introducing them to educators and young people. I am grateful for him and the other children's literature champions who have helped me have a career in this book world. Thanks, again, for thinking of me and for the role you play in young adult literature.

Kevin Kienholz

Tribute: Prof. Jack Bushman

My favorite day on the academic calendar, every single year, happens to be the Literature Festival because it brings together young readers, young adult authors, and educators who support young adult literature—an annual gathering of dedicated and enthusiastic young and not-so-young readers who assemble for a day to celebrate books, reading, and the power of the written word in the lives of young people. I participate each fall in the Literature Festival on the campus of Washburn University, and each year I leave the event with renewed energy and enthusiasm, encouraged by the sheer tonnage of passion and excitement that the participants bring to the festival and that the authors share with the young readers that they meet. And every year, as the festival draws to a close, I remain mindful of the efforts of Prof. Jack Bushman, whose groundwork laid the foundation to make the whole thing a reality and whose continued energy and guidance made it an annual reality for over 25 years.

Prof. Bushman brought numerous essential qualities to the Literature Festival that made it both a possibility and a reality: deep connections with authors and publishers in young adult literature; broad links with educators across the state of Kansas and the region; and profound knowledge, of course, in the field of YAL. But I want to highlight the fact that he also had an ability to bring people together who were interested in advocating for YAL and working on behalf of young readers, and for that I'm tremendously grateful. Because of the connections Prof. Bushman helped me forge through Literature Festival, I have developed and enjoyed professional friendships with high school teachers, librarians, and college professors from around Kansas—connections that I would never have made had it not been for the efforts of Prof. Bushman. His ability to *bring us together*, based on our mutual appreciation of YAL and our shared belief in the power of literacy in the lives of young readers, has made a real and lasting impact on my life as an educator here in the state of Kansas, and for that I owe a massive debt of gratitude to Prof. Bushman.

Because educators spend so much time in our classrooms and libraries, the profession can become, unfortunately, isolating in many ways. Through his efforts in establishing and supporting the Literature Festival, Prof. Bushman helped create an occasion for classroom teachers and authors and librarians and college professors to bridge those distances that can

separate us and, instead, stand together on the common ground that we share—our love of great books and good stories. This annual occasion to establish connections and renew friendships, occurring now for over a quarter of a century, continues to nurture and sustain an appreciation for reading and a love of books among readers both young and old here in Kansas, and I look forward to this continuing into the next quarter century as an important tribute to the excellent vision and work initiated by Jack Bushman.

Steve Loe

Yes, I was a Bushmanite. I was a believer. I was a believer that great literature—great young adult literature—could inspire students. More importantly, as a Bushmanite, I was a believer that great teachers made the difference. Yes, knowledge and passion for the content was important, but Dr. Bushman showed us that teachers teach people. Relationships first. And he walked the walk. He inspired.

Obviously as my professor, Dr. Bushman influenced my teaching career. As an ELA educator his training was essential. I look back now and wished I would have soaked up more of his knowledge and insights. But I had learned enough to know the power of really getting to know your students, meeting those students where they're at, and hooking them with relevant, engaging content to get them thinking. It's a powerful moment when a student who confesses to hating English and bragging about not reading, walks up to you and tells you, "Hey, Loe, that's the first novel I've ever finished," and then goes on to tell you how it impacted his life. I was far from a great teacher, but thanks to Dr. Bushman and his training, I did find moments where what was going on in my classroom was truly impacting students.

Dr. Bushman influenced me on a personal level too. I've always had a passion for creative writing, and when Dr. Bushman gave me my first real introduction to the power of YAL, I was driven to write a novel. I wanted to create a story that would have that lasting impact on a student. I wanted to write something that would make an English hater read his first novel. Dr. Bushman was right there to support me. He took his own time to read over early drafts. He connected me to other authors who shared their expertise. And once my first novel was published, Dr. Bushman invited me to share it with students at the annual Literature Festival.

My first novel was far from a best seller, but Dr. Bushman was unselfishly right there to help me realize a personal dream. Thank you, Dr. Bushman, for being our Mr. Keating¹.
Steve Loe

¹ Mr. Keating is the beloved English teacher/hero of *Dead Poets Society*.

Suzanne Myers

Sometimes it's hard to recall the particulars of a person. After a while, we tend to forget a person's laugh, the tone and cadence of their voice, nuances of their personality, previously predictable responses to news and conversation.

Dr. Bushman, on the other hand, is tough to forget.

In reflecting on this, I've come to think it is in part due to his absolute focus and commitment to basically two things: kids and literacy. His voice—typically the loudest and clearest in the room—was often calling out some recent injustice to student thinking, reading, or writing. He wasted little time worrying about whether his perspective was unpopular, outdated, or lacked the diplomatic tone often present in bureaucratic conversations about education policies and practices. If not speaking out against injustice, he was speaking out in advocacy for better books, better writing experiences, and better instruction for kids.

He was always on the side of kids. Even if he did not fully grasp all the complexities of a situation, even if he did not know all the details, even if he did not have the power or ability to improve something himself ... I will remember him as a person who was always reliably, enthusiastically, unapologetically, and unflinchingly on the side of kids.

What a lesson for us all.

Dr. Suzanne Myers

Assistant Research Professor, University of Kansas

Rodman Philbrick

Jack Bushman, An Appreciation

If you happen to grow up in a small town in a small, rural state, books are a portal to the rest of the world. Stories take you to places you've never even imagined. As an example, picture two boys from New Hampshire. One seeks an education in Ottawa, Kansas, and makes a life in that part of the world, teaching teachers how to teach English. The other boy never leaves home, not really, except in his imagination. Two paths diverge, you might say, but what diverges one day converges, at a festival of literature brought to life by the first boy.

And that's how I met Jack Bushman, a native of Franklin, New Hampshire, who took it on the road, and made an exemplary life in the world of books, stories, and literature for young people. Four years of teaching English to ninth graders

convinced him that forcing students to read “classics” was a bad idea. Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* was more likely to appeal to young readers than Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

It was Jack's strong belief that teachers have a mission to keep kids reading. Indeed, he co-authored a textbook on doing just that. But he wasn't done yet, not by a long shot. Next up, a non-profit organization he founded, The Writing Conference. The mission, and he chose to accept it, was to provide services to children, young adults, and teachers for the improvement of writing and reading skills.

One of the main events was a literature festival, and that's where I come into the picture. I'd been writing adult crime novels for 15 years, and had stumbled on an idea for a middle school story about how making a friend can change a life. Jack read my book and used it in his classes, thus helping a little-known author find a place in classrooms across the country. Then he invited me to speak at one of his yearly festivals. After toiling for years in relative obscurity, another boy from New Hampshire offered me the honor of his respect. I can't tell you how much that meant to me, because the consequences are still ongoing, all these years later.

Thanks, John “Jack” Bushman, educator extraordinaire! You threw a stone into the pond and the ripples are still expanding.

Lois Ruby

Jack surprised me. My first impression when he invited me to present at one of his writing conferences celebrating the Heartland Award, was that he was a soft-spoken, lugubrious guy who happened to be totally entranced by young adult books as literature. *Literature!* He believed what we were doing had merit, even changed lives. I stood in amazement as students and teachers and parents swarmed into the KU conference center, eager to listen to authors and—what's this?—buy books! And then I met his retinue of acolytes—KU students and recent alums, for whom Dr. Bushman was their spirit guide as they graduated and taught in schools across Kansas, inflamed with Jack's zeal.

Thus, a long friendship and professional collaboration began. Here are some random memories of those years ...

- Jack and I traveled to Garden City. He treated me to dinner and, always the gentleman, he walked me safely back to my room, nurtured and nourished, to rest up for the onslaught of eager young readers in the morning. Who else but Dr. John Bushman could stir up such enthusiasm for teen books?

- Another conference in Lawrence: there'd been a lot of rain, and streets were flooded. Those authors who arrived before the deluge gathered for the dinner Jack planned, but the host's seat was empty. He was hopelessly stuck trying to get back from the airport with the last straggling author, and so we ate heartily on his dime (oysters, as I recall), but so much of the conversation centered on stories about how key Jack was in our career development. He was, for some of us, almost a kingmaker. Without him, our books would have sunk into the bog.
- One summer, Jack planned a writing camp for teens at Rock Springs 4-H camp near Junction City. A handful of authors spent a delightful week teaching, writing, critiquing, listening, and nourishing young people filled with passion for the written word. There was one catch. The river crested, and the humble dorms were flooded. Industrial fans cranked and blasted, trying to dry up the worst of the soaked carpeting, but each step in the room was deep squish. I figured I'd persevere – until I found three frogs swimming in the shower. For years afterwards, Jack boasted about the great accommodations, and how one of his writing camp teachers slept in her car rather than entertain frogs in her room.
- More recently, at perhaps the last of the Writing Conferences in Lawrence, Jack got into an auto accident on his way to the event. He and his car came out of it pretty battered, but he had a trunk full of our books to deliver before kids arrived. He was obviously in pain trudging into the gym with a carton of books. For him, the books were always primary. When the remainders were reloaded into his car at the end of the day, Jack went directly to the emergency room. Talk about dedication!

What Jack did for his grad students who marched into classrooms of their own with a zest for young adult literature, and what he did for those of us addicted to writing it, can never be measured. As for me, he generously gave me exactly what I needed to stick it out in a field often fraught with rejection and frustration. In his own unflashy, sweetly stumbling way, he inspired generations of readers, teachers, and writers. He believed in us all.

Good job, Jack, and thank you from the bottom of my heart for your ardent support and friendship. We all miss you so.

Love,
LOIS RUBY

Robert Sailer

Here is an anecdote about Dr. Bushman I just remembered after seeing Venn diagrams.

I remember one simple lecture Dr Bushman gave in a young adult literature class that sums up his philosophy succinctly about teaching literature to secondary students. He drew two circles. He labeled one "Things you teach in your class." The other he titled, "Things that need to be taught in your English class." I discovered the area where the two circles intersected for my classroom was not as large as I'd want. I scrapped my next day's lesson on gerunds and pulled out a "borrowed poem" lesson I'd fleeced off a retired colleague. You talk about two roads diverging. The grammar books ended up in the trash dumpster at the end of the year.

Bob Sailer
Co-director, The Writing Conference, Inc.

Barbara Stuber

Thank you for sending me John Bushman's obituary. Although I did not know him very well, or for very long, I connected to his deep reverence for literature and his dedication to lighting thousands of creative sparks in the minds of his students. I am very honored to be among that group. I remember him as a high energy, broad minded, and dynamic man. Someone following a mission of the heart.

Section Editor's Note

My intent was to display the individuality of responders by retaining the font and format with which they responded to The Call. In some cases, I increased font size to 12 point to enhance readability. For headings I used Century Schoolbook: somehow the word "school" in the name of the font seemed to me to reflect an essential characteristic of Dr. Bushman's influence. Otherwise, I edited for propriety and space.

I am, of course, responsible for errors. – John Franklin

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Nathan Grant Whitman
Derby High School, Derby, Kansas

Abstract

KATE President Nathan Whitman provides personal and general educational reflections and insights into the 2022 school year, including an overview of educational fads in government, a statistical snapshot of trends and problems in teacher retention – including censorship, happenings within KATE’s programming for educators, and a call to action.

Keywords

perspectives, reflection, COVID-19, pandemic, teachers, retention, education, turnover, statistics, educational leadership, censorship, No Child Left Behind, NCLB, redesign, colleagues, hope



If one thing is certain, this year has been one of constant change and *uncertainty*. For me, personally, this change came in the form of working for a new district—a change that was much needed for mental health and opportunities for professional growth. Even though I was moving from a building of 250 to a building of more than 2,000, for the first time, I had the opportunity to work with a true English department (no more one-man show!). There was a lot to be nervous about, but despite the uncertainty, I had the opportunity to help lead our school’s Gender and Sexuality Alliance. I had the opportunity to grow relationships with new colleagues and students in the building I graduated from, while improving its climate and environment for them. In a year where lots of stress and uncertainty surrounded me, I was able to find the good of change, yet I recognize change isn’t always for the better. Oftentimes change leads to mixed or muddled results, and, in the worst-case scenario, disaster.

In my decade of teaching, I’ve witnessed the tail end of the devastating Brownback administration’s effect on Kansas education coupled with the woefully implemented No Child Left Behind. I’ve witnessed the pearl clutching and fear-mongering surrounding the well-intentioned attempt to implement Common Core State Standards. I’ve witnessed and participated in school redesign. I’ve also witnessed how Governor Kelly helped to revitalize funding for Kansas schools, only for those efforts to be undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consequently, like my colleagues, I’ve never before witnessed such flux in the state of Kansas, let alone the nation, when it comes to teaching and staffing shortages. As of right now, there are 1,664 teaching vacancies in the state (*Educate Kansas*, 2022). An exodus of unprecedented proportions is occurring in our nation’s public schools; 51% of all teacher vacancies are from resignation, and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to 61% of all staffing shortages (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2022). On top of staffing, teachers presently feel like or find that they are under attack from those who wish to censor the diverse offerings of libraries, classrooms, and curriculum: *All Boys Aren't Blue*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and even *Romeo and Juliet*—among others—have found themselves in the crosshairs of concerned parents and overzealous congressional leaders. Our state and nation are at a tipping point, and I wish I had a solution. However, I know that there is no one absolute fix for all of this.

What does one do in this present climate to stay sane and stay in the profession? I, for one, look to my colleagues for renewal and inspiration—like this year's return of the [KATE Fall Annual Conference](#) with Laura Packer and Samira Ahmed, or the silver linings of what the pandemic did bring to education. Innovative approaches to technology, integration, funding, and movement towards increased equity have made great strides amid the hardships. I also look toward future KATE Book Clubs and the return of gatherings like [KATE Camp](#). It's easy to look at the negatives because even though we're more connected in a digital age, we may still be geographically far apart, and we are waiting for the hope that the CDC data will bring regarding how and what endemic COVID-19 will look like. Nevertheless, I know that there is hope.

Thus, one thing I challenge all teachers of English reading this journal to do is to reflect on the connections they have with their departments, with one another, with their students, and with their communities. I also encourage you to take the scholarship, poems, teaching tips, and advice from educators featured in this journal and make positive change in your classrooms and teaching practices. Finally, embrace the change of the seasons. It's summer! You've earned your break. And, if you are going to leave the profession, run towards something greater. Effect change on a larger front: run for your local Board of Education. Run for office. Give voice to those of us still in our classrooms trying to effect change one pupil at a time.

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Author Biography

Nathan G. Whitman (he/him), M.A. English, B.A. Secondary English Education & Creative Writing, is the current Kansas Association of Teachers of English President and the Editor in Chief of its [Voices of Kansas](#) journal. He teaches English at Derby High School USD 260 and is also an adjunct professor at Hutchinson Community College and WSU Tech. He is a recipient of the 2014 Kansas Cable Telecommunications Horizon Award and a member of the Kansas Exemplary Educators Network. He can be reached at nwhitman@usd260.com and on Twitter [@writerwhitman](#).

