Kansas English

2024, Volume 105

Kansas Association of Teachers of English

Sun Seeker by Jenni Bader

In this issue ...

- **Practitioner piece** by Carolyn L. Carlson
- **Reflective essays** by Stephanie Robinson; Haven Massey; Carrie B. Tholstrup
- **Scholarly article** by Ambyr Rios
- **Author interview** by Kevin B. Kienholz
- **Poetry** by Dave Malone
- **Teaching tips** by Carrie Dickison; Beth Gulley; Rebecca Kastendick; LuAnn Fox
- **Book reviews** by Michelle Anderson, Baylee Reyes, and Mattelyn Swartz; Madilyn Kramer; Haven Massey; Danika Pester; John Franklin

Kansas English

The peer-reviewed journal of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English
2024, Volume 105

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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.

Learn more about manuscript and submission requirements on the "**Write for Kansas English**" page of the *KE* website. In addition, *Kansas English* features several edited columns for which authors can submit the following types of manuscripts.

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Learn more about column manuscript and submission requirements on the "**KE Columns**" page of the *KE* website.

DEADLINE for submissions for the 2025 issue of *Kansas English*: January 15, 2025

Kansas English 2024, Volume 105

1 From the Editor: Join the Professional Conversation
Katherine Mason Cramer

4 Perspectives from the President
Nathan G. Whitman

Practitioner Piece

7 These Books Matter: A Banned Books Week Celebration
Carolyn L. Carlson

Reflective Essays

13 Why the Need for Writing Instruction Persists in the Age of Generative AI: A Professional and Personal Reflection
Stephanie Robinson

17 Do as I Say *and* as I Do: Creating Strong Writers by Emphasizing and Modeling the Process
Haven Massey

21 Putting Together the Pieces of Effective Instruction: The Role of Structured Literacy
Carrie B. Tholstrup

Scholarly Article

26 The Kansas Literary Canon: A Study of Texts Taught in High School English Courses
Ambyr Rios

Author Interview

38 Patience and Persistence: Author Janae Marks Encourages Young Readers and Writers at the 2023 Literature Festival
Kevin B. Kienholz

Poetry

42 Driving through the Night to Get Home
Dave Malone

43 **First Snow at the Body Shop**
Dave Malone

44 **Bucket Calf**
Dave Malone

Teaching Tips

45 **Revising Writing Assessments in Response to Generative AI**
Carrie Dickison

47 **MLA Citation Dissections**
Beth Gulley

49 **Heads Up! and Collaborative Sentence Writing**
Rebecca Kastendick

51 **Directed Reading Thinking Activity: A Gradual Release Method to Demystify Reading**
LuAnn Fox

Children's Book Review

53 **Unveiling Courage: A Review of Trudy Ludwig's *Brave Every Day***
Michelle Anderson, Baylee Reyes, Mattelyn Swartz

Young Adult (YA) Book Reviews

55 **A Road Trip of Acceptance and Love: A Review of Amber McBride's *Me (Moth)***
Madilyn Kramer

57 **Monumental Stories Found in *We Deserve Monuments***
Haven Massey

59 **A Glimpse of McCurdy: Her Rise & Fall from Fame in *I'm Glad My Mom Died***
Danika Pester

61 **Back on Track: Academic and Athletic Adventures in *Growing Season* by James V. Jacobs**
John Franklin

FROM THE EDITOR: JOIN THE PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATION

Katherine Mason Cramer, *Kansas English* Editor-in-Chief
Wichita State University

Abstract
Kansas English Editor-in-Chief Katie Cramer encourages readers to notice how authors of the 2024 issue of *Kansas English* elevate urgent issues in teaching and literacy, and consider how they, too, can join the professional conversation.

Keywords: professional dialogue, inquiry, teacher-scholars, writing for publication, KATE

Did you know that writing for publication enhances teacher learning, classroom practice, reflection, and inquiry (Rathert & Okan, 2015)? Did you also know that you can publish your scholarly and creative work in ***two*** different venues hosted by the Kansas Association of Teachers of English (KATE)? KATE Pages is KATE's official blog, and it publishes a variety of pieces throughout the year on KATE's award-winning website. *Kansas English* is KATE's award-winning peer-reviewed journal that invites scholarly and creative work of interest to English and literacy educators at all levels. Not all National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) state affiliates provide these publishing opportunities for their members and beyond. I am proud that KATE does.

In fact, as editor-in-chief of *Kansas English*, I delight in the ways that authors in this and every issue initiate and continue dialogues about topics that are important to English and literacy teachers at all levels. Although the authors of different manuscripts for the 2024 issue of *Kansas English* did not collaborate with one another, their work seems to be in conversation. For example, **Stephanie Robinson** reflects on the value of writing instruction in the age of generative artificial intelligence (GAI), while **Carrie Dickison**, **Haven Massey**, and **Beth Gulley** offer perspectives and applications for effective writing instruction that resists the narrative that GAI will replace human-generated compositions. Similarly, **Ambyr Rios** shares research that reveals a continued dearth of diverse texts in Kansas high school English classrooms, while **Carolyn L. Carlson** offers strategies for resisting censorship challenges (which tend to target diverse books and authors); **Kevin B. Kienholz** introduces us to middle grades author Janae Marks, whose books and short stories feature protagonists of Color; and **Haven Massey** reviews the award-winning YA novel *We Deserve Monuments* by Jas Hammonds, who writes about queer characters, identifies as a mixed-race Black and white person, and uses she/they pronouns.

I hope you will take time this summer to read and learn from these pieces and consider how you might join the conversation by …

- Submitting your work to KATE PAGES, edited by Caleb K. Thornton,
- Submitting a breakout proposal to the KATE Conference, and

- Submitting your scholarly and creative work to *Kansas English*.

Think about how you can be in dialogue with the pieces in this issue (or previous issues) of *Kansas English* by talking/writing back to them, citing them in your work, and bringing your informed perspective and ideas to the ongoing professional conversation.

For example, notice how **Aaron Rife**'s 2019 reflective essay "Missing the Signs: Imperfect Allyship and the Re-examination of Personal Biases" builds on, responds to, and cites **Jenni Bader**'s 2017 reflective essay "Supporting Students and Their Emerging Sense of Self." How might you compose in response to the work you find in the digital pages of *Kansas English*? Try reading with the intent to both learn *and* build on the ideas and perspectives you encounter in this issue's pieces, which I briefly describe below:

In "Perspectives from the President," **KATE President Nathan G. Whitman** shares his hopeful and encouraging take on the 2023-2024 academic year in Kansas.

In her practitioner piece "These Books Matter: A Banned Books Week Celebration," **Carolyn L. Carlson** describes a university event designed to deepen attendees' understanding of commonly challenged/banned books, as well as how to resist censorship. (Notice how Carlson's piece is in conversation with **Jessica Marston's** 2023 *Kansas English* scholarly article "'Pleasure to Burn:' A Comprehensive Look into the History of Censoring Literature in School Environments.")

Stephanie Robinson explores the transformative power and absolute necessity of writing instruction that aids in self-discovery and deepens students' understanding of a complex world in her reflective essay "Why the Need for Writing Instruction Still Persists in the Age of Generative AI: A Professional and Personal Reflection."

In her reflective essay, "Putting Together the Pieces of Effective Instruction: The Role of Structured Literacy," **Carrie B. Tholstrup** compares the qualities of effective structured literacy instruction to the qualities of jigsaw puzzle assembly, noting that both involve sequential, cumulative instruction; varying levels of explicit instruction; and assessment.

Haven Massey explores her own evolving writing process and how it impacts her instructional practice in her reflective essay "Do as I Say *and* as I Do: Creating Strong Writers by Emphasizing and Modeling the Process."

In her scholarly article "The Kansas Literary Canon: A Study of Texts Taught in High School English Courses," **Ambyr Rios** shares her research on recent high school graduates' reports of the most commonly taught texts in Kansas high school English classes, revealing a continued lack of diversity in texts and authors.

In his interview with author Janae Marks, the featured writer at the 2023 Heartland Literature Festival at Washburn University, **Kevin B. Kienholz** highlights Marks' emphasis on patience and persistence in the life of a writer, as well as her invitation to young readers to experience a range of genres and topics to build their reading lives.

Dave Malone invites us to pause, savor, and be in awe of everyday moments in his three poems: "Driving through the Night to Get Home," "First Snow at the Body Shop," and "Bucket Calf."

The Teaching Tips column brings us pedagogical strategies that we can immediately integrate into our curriculum designs. Column authors for this issue include **Carrie Dickison**, **LuAnn Fox**, **Beth Gulley**, and **Rebecca Kastendick**.

A children's book review by **Michelle Anderson, Baylee Reyes, and Mattelyn Swartz** and young adult book reviews by **Haven Massey**, **Madilyn Kramer**, **Danika Pester**, and **John Franklin** provide us with recently published books to add to our to-read list and (classroom) libraries.

Again, think about how you can be in conversation with the ideas shared by your peers in this and previous issues of *Kansas English*. Think about the topics addressed by authors in this issue (structured literacy, generative AI, book bans and challenges, the continued homogeneity of Kansas' literary canon, innovative teaching tips, and new authors and books to include in your curriculum), and ask yourself:

- What ideas and issues would you like to respond to?
- What new ideas do you want to bring to the discussion?

Start drafting. Open your writer's notebook, journal, or device, and get your ideas down (see Haven Massey's reflective essay in this issue for inspiration!). We'd love to learn from your insights and perspective in KATE PAGES, an upcoming issue of *Kansas English*, and/or at a breakout session at a future KATE Conference. Join the professional dialogue; we need your voice.

Before I sign off, I have an exciting update about *Kansas English*. With support from the KATE Executive Board, Journal Manager Dr. Susan J. Matveyeva is leading efforts to assign a digital object identifier (DOI) to the journal itself and to individual pieces in each issue, including all manuscripts published since 2017 when *Kansas English* became freely available online in Wichita State University's Open Journal Systems. The DOI will serve as a persistent identifier and persistent link on the internet, so that *Kansas English* manuscripts can be accessed reliably, regardless of where they are stored. Since APA Style and MLA Style both urge authors to include DOIs, when available, for each source in their references list or works cited, it's exciting that *Kansas English* now offers this service to its authors and readers. In fact, Dr. Matveyeva and her team have already added DOIs to all *Kansas English* manuscripts currently available online (2017-2023). Previous *KE* authors can locate their work and include the DOI in their references to their publications (e.g., in resumes and curriculum vitae). Thanks to Dr. Matveyeva and her team for continuing to strengthen and extend *Kansas English*'s online presence and accessibility, so that readers all over the world can benefit from the wisdom and experiences shared by *KE* authors.

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Author Biography

Katherine (Katie) Mason Cramer, Ph.D. (she/her) is starting her 15th year as Program Chair and Professor of English Education in Wichita State University's School of Education. Prior to earning her doctorate, Katie was a middle school English teacher in Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools, and she has maintained her Kansas teaching licenses (ELA 5-9 and 7-12) so that a joyful return to the middle or high school ELA classroom is always possible. She has been a member of KATE and on the Executive Board since moving back to Kansas (from Arizona and Georgia) in 2010, and she has served as Editor of *Kansas English* since 2017. Under her leadership, *Kansas English* has been honored with NCTE's Affiliate Journal of Excellence Award in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. Katie's research and publications center the use of young adult literature to recognize, affirm, and teach diverse genders and sexualities in ELA classrooms and curricula. She can be reached at Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Nathan G. Whitman
Derby High School, WSU Tech

Abstract
KATE President Nathan Whitman provides a hopeful and encouraging reflection on the 2023-2024 school year.

Keywords: education, politics, Kansas, teaching, perseverance, advocacy, teacher preparation

Last year, I presented a reflection via a football analogy. It was a somber reflection and one whose tone I hoped would not carry over into this year's perspective. Luckily, I was partially right. Unlike the past two years of 1,700 and 1,800 teacher vacancies as we entered summer (Educate Kansas, 2022-2023), this year, only 1,600 educational vacancies exist (Educate Kansas, 2024). However, this number still speaks to the educational crisis that Kansas—and to be fair, the United States—finds itself a part of. Is this the start to a downward trend? We can hope.

Speaking of hope: Governor Laura Kelly successfully led an effort to fully fund special education in Kansas after much political turmoil (*Governor Kelly Fully Funds Kansas Schools*, 2024). Investment into the science of reading continues to grow (Carpenter, 2024). Moreover, there was a significant overhaul by the KSBOE for graduation requirements, starting with this incoming freshman class, that finally tackle Individual Plans of Study and financial literacy (Deines, 2024). Furthermore, a new coalition of colleges is now working together towards making an education degree more affordable in an initiative known as Educate the State (Wray, 2024). One can only hope that these and other endeavors add some sense and stability to the educational landscape which has been fraught with chaos and challenges.

Nevertheless, while we did gain some ground, there are still issues to be faced, like the unprecedented open enrollment of districts for the upcoming school year (Perez, 2024) and bills that target LGBT+ individuals and students under the logical fallacy of protecting children from obscenity (Barackman, 2024). On top of all that, ESSER funds from the COVID-19 pandemic are going away, leading to the elimination of needed services and roles (Loging and Heilman, 2024), and combating generative AI is still an ongoing issue in classrooms, especially those in English Language Arts; however, some institutions and teachers have even embraced the technology (Mark, 2024).

We still must fight for public education and the future of our students. But we have hope.

Some things are changing for the better. NCTE continues to support affiliates through professional development opportunities, like this summer's Affiliate Leadership Meeting (NCTE, 2024). Collaborations at the state level provide leadership opportunities for educators of all walks, like the new KS LEADS conference (Bush, 2023). Change is hard. Change is difficult. Change, though, is necessary for hope. Be part of the change you want to see by joining organizations, attending conferences, speaking up at board of education meetings, and serving on committees. Now, for the shameless plug: regarding leadership opportunities, did you know that you can nominate yourself for the Kansas Association of Teachers of English board on our website?

I *hope* to see you at our upcoming fall 2024 conference: *Voices From Our Backyard*. Effect change by presenting and attending. The Kansas Association of Teachers of English, and educators like you, have been—and continue to be—one of my sources of hope and inspiration.

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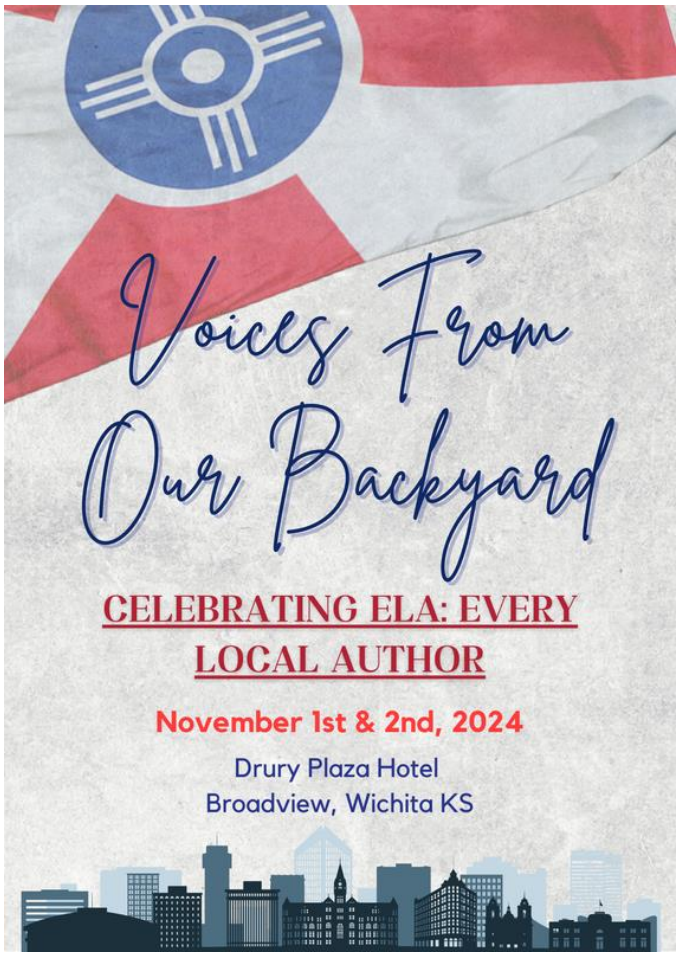

KATE Fall Annual Conference
November 1-2, 2024
Drury Plaza Hotel Broadview
Wichita, Kansas

Learn more and register at https://www.kansasenglish.org/fall-conference.html.

THESE BOOKS MATTER: A BANNED BOOKS WEEK CELEBRATION

Carolyn L. Carlson
Washburn University

Abstract
In recent years there has been an increase in book banning in public schools, which denies students access to texts. Therefore, it is essential that individuals become advocates against censorship in public school libraries. An educational/advocacy event was held on a university campus as part of the nationwide events highlighting the American Library Association's Banned Books Week. The focus of this event was for participants to read/listen to readings of banned books, learn about the types of books that are banned in K-12 public schools across the country, understand the process (or lack thereof) by which books are typically banned, and discuss ways to advocate against banning books in public school libraries. Each of the six event engagements was thoughtfully designed to engage participants with banned books. Individuals/groups who desire to host their own event for Banned Books Week (or any anti-censorship event) can use this framework to develop their event to advocate against censorship.

Keywords: censorship, literature, banned books, advocacy

Introduction

Access to books is a foundation of the educational system and a democratic society. Books that offer windows to the world or mirrors to oneself can encourage diversity of thought, broaden global perspectives, celebrate unique cultures, and motivate readers to explore. In short, these books matter. However, in recent years there has been an increase in book banning in public schools, which prevents students from accessing them. According to the American Library Association (ALA) (2024), the number of titles targeted for censorship at public school libraries across the United States increased by 11 percent over the previous year.

To effectively advocate against censorship in public schools, awareness and education are essential. Each year since 1982, the ALA has designated one week in the fall as "Banned Books Week" to celebrate books and advocate for their access (American Library Association, 2023). While advocacy is a year-round effort, this week shines a light on the importance of access to books in public school libraries. Libraries, classrooms, schools, and communities host a variety of events to highlight the importance of these books. Events such as these bring awareness and education so that more individuals can become advocates for access to books.

Background

Public schools have an obligation to provide students with access to information. As noted in the Library Bill of Rights, it is the duty of all libraries to provide information presenting all points

of view and materials should not be removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval (American Library Association, 2019). This includes access to books written about a variety of subjects – even subjects that some consider controversial. Titles representing the voices and experiences of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC individuals made up 47% of those targeted in censorship attempts in libraries across the country (American Library Association, 2024). Books that contain so-called "controversial" topics can often be the most thought-provoking books to read. However, if these books are successfully banned, students are denied the opportunity to read and reflect upon these texts. This negatively impacts all students because it prevents students from seeing themselves in the books and it prevents students from learning about others from reading the books. As Smolkin and Young (2011) note, "such books are seen as self-affirming mirrors for children of a given culture and as windows into other lives for children outside that given culture" (p. 217). Books become "mirrors" that reflect their own lives (Bishop, 1990). Sometimes those "controversial" texts are the ones that students can relate to the most and removing them also removes the chance for a student to connect with a text. In addition to giving students the opportunity to see themselves in literature, these books become "windows" to new information and identities, inviting readers to deepen their understanding of and appreciation for the diversity that exists in their local and global communities (Bishop, 1990). Books might be the only place where readers meet people who are not like themselves and who, therefore, offer alternative worldviews (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014).

All children have a right to access books that reflect their own identities and books that open unfamiliar worlds to them (Bishop, 2012). However, books are routinely challenged and banned in public schools throughout the country. According to the National Coalition Against Censorship (2013), "censorship is particularly harmful in the schools because it prevents student with inquiring minds from exploring the world, seeking truth and reason, stretching their intellectual capacities, and becoming critical thinkers" (p. 1). Advocacy events such as those hosted by the ALA during Banned Books Week can engage individuals with books and educate individuals on the importance of these books.

Banned Books Week Celebration Overview

As part of the nationwide events highlighting the ALA's Banned Books Week, an educational/advocacy event was held on a university campus. The focus of this event, called "These Books Matter: A Banned Books Week Celebration," was for participants to engage with various aspects of censorship including reading/listening to readings of banned books, learning about the types of books that are banned in K-12 public schools across the country, understanding the process (or lack thereof) by which books are typically banned, and discussing ways to advocate against banning books in public school libraries. A series of "engagements" (i.e., activities, presentations, discussions) were designed so that participants could interact with the topic in a variety of ways. The event lasted approximately three hours, was set up on the lawn in the center of campus, and had approximately 500 participants, including students, faculty, staff, and community members. Each element of the event was thoughtfully designed to engage participants with banned books. Individuals/groups who desire to host their own event for Banned Books Week (or any anti-censorship event) can use this as a framework to develop their own event to advocate against censorship.

Engagement #1: Read-Aloud Video

Prior to the event, a video compilation of banned books being read aloud was created. This video contained readings of full picture books, excerpts from novels, and readings by the actual authors. The readings represented a variety of diverse issues and different genres. For example, the video contained an excerpt of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) and the complete book of *And Tango*

Makes Three (Richardson & Parnell, 2007). Further, one portion of the video featured Shel Silverstein reading his poem, "Abigail and the Beautiful Pony" (Silverstein, 1981). The 90-minute video was professionally edited for smooth transitions and proper formatting. At the event, it was played continuously on a big screen so participants could watch as few or as many readings as they preferred. In addition, one university faculty member engaged participants in discussions of the texts as the video played.

Engagement #2: Themed Drinks and Snacks

Rather than provide generic snacks and drinks to participants, these items were carefully chosen to align with books that were highlighted at the event. A university faculty member explained the alignment of the snacks to the books to participants, which sparked further conversation about censorship. By choosing this approach, participants engaged with banned books when choosing what snacks and drinks to enjoy during the event (see Table 1).

Table 1: Alignment of Snacks/Drinks to Banned Books

Snack/Drink	Banned Book
Goldfish Crackers	*A Bad Kitty Christmas* (Bruel)
Red Hots	*Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury)
Tangerine Sparkling Water	*Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Baldacchino)
Grape Fruit Leather Strips	*The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck)
Cocktail Rye Bread	*Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger)
Sweet Tea	*To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee)
Apples	*The Giving Tree* (Silverstein)
Blue Sugar Cookies	*All Boys Aren't Blue* (Johnson)
Cotton Candy	*The Lorax* (Seuss)
Water	*Maus* (Spiegelman)
Gummy Worms	*Worm Loves Worm* (Austrian)
Chocolate Milk	*Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* (Sanders)
Ice Cream	*Abigail and the Beautiful Pony* (Silverstein)

Engagement #3: Trivia

Prior to the event, an electronic trivia game was created that included questions about banned books. Approximately 250 questions about banned books were compiled into a quiz-like format and displayed on computer monitors. A faculty member discussed the questions and answers with the participants as they attempted to answer the questions (see Table 2).

Table 2: Sample Trivia Questions and Answers

Question	Answer
What classic novel was challenged in 1981 for being "demoralizing inasmuch as it implies that man is little more than an animal"?	*Lord of the Flies* (Golding)
This famous children's book was banned in America because talking animals were seen to be ungodly.	*Charlotte's Web* (White)
Identify the banned and challenged book based on the first line: "It was a pleasure to burn."	*Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury)
This Dr. Seuss book was banned because it offended forestry workers and the logging industry.	*The Lorax* (Seuss)
Which classic was banned because school districts objected to the use of alcohol in the illustration?	*Little Red Riding Hood* (Crane)
Take a trip down the rabbit hole with this book, which has been banned in the U.S. for perceived drug references.	*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll)
List one reason why the following title was challenged/banned: *Drama* written and illustrated by Raina Telgemeier	Banned and challenged for including LGBTQIA+ characters and themes

Engagement #4: 1000-Piece Puzzle

Participants were invited to help assemble a 1000-piece puzzle featuring the covers of banned books as the image. As participants worked on finding puzzle pieces and examining the book covers represented in the puzzle, a faculty member engaged them in discussions about the books they saw on the image. Participants collaborated to build the puzzle and engaged in discussions of the various books represented (see Image 1).

Image 1: Banned Books Puzzle

Engagement #5: Posters and Displays

At all areas of the event, posters and other displays provided participants with information on books that have been banned, the process for banning books, the current year's top ten banned books, and advocacy resources. For example, one poster was developed to display ideas for becoming an advocate against censorship. These ideas include posting on social media, attending school board meetings, sharing banned books, and hosting a banned books party.

Engagement #6: Giveaways

Participants were invited to take numerous items in addition to the snacks and drinks available at the event. This was to encourage participants to engage with this information after the event's conclusion.

First, a selection of banned books was provided to participants so they could choose one to keep. Participants were encouraged to read the book and pass it on to someone else and to share the censorship information they had learned. Books such as *Maus, The Hate U Give, The Hill We Climb,* and *All Boys Aren't Blue* were available for participants to take with them.

Second, banned books themed shirts were designed for the event and handed out to participants. Participants were encouraged to wear their shirts in the future and discuss how to advocate against censorship in public school libraries with anyone who inquired about their shirt.

Third, smaller items such as wooden bookmarks (with banned books messages printed on them), coloring sheets representing banned books, and buttons with the event logo on them were also given to participants.

Fourth, handouts on banned book facts and advocacy resources were provided. These included information on how books are typically banned and what can be done to advocate against censorship in public school libraries.

Summary

Banned Books Week events increase awareness and education so that more individuals can become advocates for access to books in public school libraries. By attending an event that allows for new knowledge and lively discussion, participants can learn about the importance of access to books in public schools. Each of these six opportunities for engagement with banned books gave participants a way to interact with the information presented. This format allowed for a controversial and sometimes intense topic to be presented in an informal but highly informative manner. Through interactive engagements, discussions with faculty members, informative displays, and take-home items, participants immersed themselves in this important and timely topic to encourage them to become advocates against censorship. As challenges to books in public school libraries continues to rise, events such as these can provide the knowledge and strategies needed to increase advocacy efforts to preserve the right to access books.

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WHY THE NEED FOR WRITING INSTRUCTION PERSISTS IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI: A PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

Stephanie Robinson
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Abstract
As an educator reflecting on the challenges posed by generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), especially with the rise of models like ChatGPT, I explore the enduring significance of writing instruction in the modern-day classroom. Starting with a personal encounter that exemplifies the transformative potential of writing, this piece delves into my journey as an English teacher. The central question revolves around whether GenAI writing diminishes the value of traditional essays, prompting a deep exploration of my own experiences and beliefs as an educator. I emphasize the cathartic essence of writing, extending beyond academic standards to become a crucial tool for self-discovery and understanding the complexities of the world. Despite the influence of AI on every aspect of our society now, I assert that fostering authentic conversations and teaching reflective essays are essential for students' personal growth and critical thinking.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, AI, generative AI, GenAI, ChatGPT, writing instruction, traditional essays, reflective essays, personal growth

"What's the biggest problem English teachers face?" a colleague of mine from grad school asked me one day over brunch.

"There are many, but the biggest on my mind—right now—at this very moment—is generative artificial intelligence and the question of whether writing instruction still matters in this modern world," I responded.

When ChatGPT took the world by storm, there was concern about its capabilities and its erroneous results, coupled with the fact that it writes in a very dry and basic manner. However, some of my colleagues use it to plan lessons and even draft emails. The debate about its effectiveness is still being pursued, and yes, many could argue that the secret is out. There's no turning away from artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace or anywhere. What startles me more recently is the question of whether generative AI (GenAI) has shown that writing instruction is no longer important. In fact, several respected colleagues of mine have asked if teaching the essay (any essay) is an effective way to assess student comprehension, understanding, and ultimately, mastery of a unit's goals.

Is writing in the ELA classroom needed? It was such a shocking question I never thought I'd hear such a thing, but I heard it from several people who really wondered about the effectiveness of it in a world where content generated by ChatGPT and other GenAI models cannot always be detected. The question surprised and troubled me because the very reason I chose to become an English teacher was to teach writing to students and show them its power, regardless of whether they need to write another argumentative essay after graduating from high school.

When I entered the teaching profession as a post-secondary and secondary English teacher, my primary goal was to instill a passion for writing in the upcoming generation. Writing had been my lifeline during a challenging childhood and a tumultuous high school experience. Despite not always having the best English teachers, one history teacher stood out in cultivating my love for writing. His encouragement allowed my creativity to flourish in essays, shaping my belief in the power of written expression.

One such day as a lowly high school sophomore after a particularly hard night at home and feeling as though I had no prospects in life, I came into my first-hour history class and began work on our assignment. To this day, I could not tell you what that assignment was, but I can tell you that my pen died, and that was simply the last straw for sophomore me. After incessant screaming all throughout the night in a troubled home and lacking significant sleep, I threw my pen across the room heatedly and without warning.

Several students laughed and whispered, but Mr. Teefy, my history teacher, walked over to me and leaned down. I thought, *oh boy, I'm getting in trouble—this is my first time getting in trouble—what do I do?*

"Are you okay?"

Those were the three words that escaped his lips. I looked at him and he looked at me, with more concern than anger.

"No," I said and then, as a teenager often does in these moments, I began to cry.

"Why don't you write about it?" he said, giving me a pen from his pocket. "Don't worry about this worksheet. Just write about it and then we'll talk after class."

This is a moment that I think about often as an educator and as an individual who tries to cultivate grace in herself and in others. I still get misty-eyed thinking about this moment because the kindness my teacher extended that day forever changed me. Those three words "Are you okay?" showed me that he valued me as a person, and then, without hesitation, the request to write about it, showed me he wanted to know what was wrong. What's more, his wanting to talk about it after class, solidified the feeling that perhaps there could be a solution that I didn't know about. I wrote and I wrote; I wrote as though my life depended on it, and at the end, I apologized for being disruptive: "I'm sorry," I wrote in messy handwriting. "I like your class, but I'm tired, and I feel so alone."

As a teenager, having this reflective moment made me more aware of who I was and who I could be. This is where my love for writing fully flourished and I saw the power it could have in my life.

This was a moment that showed me how cathartic writing can be. It wasn't to meet a standard but to be acknowledged as a person. I remember feeling as though something in me had shifted after that class. It was due to the kindness of my teacher and his invitation to write. I suddenly recognized why I was upset—it was not the stupid Dollar Store pen. It was deeper than that. As a teenager, having this reflective moment made me more aware of who I was and who I could be. This is where my love for writing fully flourished and I saw the power it could have in my life.

As I progressed through my academic journey beyond high school into the post-secondary arena, from a philosophy major to an English literature major, I encountered a shifting landscape in

education. The rise of AI-generated content, including ChatGPT, provoked questions about the relevance of traditional essays. Debates emerged within the educational community—is the essay still a valuable tool for evaluating students' progress, or are there more efficient and modern alternatives? My initial outrage colored my worldview. Of course, writing matters—how could it not? Why were we even asking such a silly question? Writing is more than punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure.

Initially resistant to this concept of the loss of credibility of the essay, I, as a proponent of multimodal composition, began contemplating the necessity of essays. Reflecting on my own experiences, I realized that writing essays had been crucial not just to meet academic standards but to understand myself. As I transitioned to teaching writing at the college level, I encountered students apprehensive about composition, especially those for whom English was a second language.

I made it a priority to convey to my students that their success was my success. I aimed to demystify writing, emphasizing that it wasn't about being exceptionally smart or sounding sophisticated immediately. Writing, I insisted, was about putting ideas on paper and engaging in the critical thinking inherent in the writing process. It's about illustrating the thoughts we have in our heads on a piece of paper and then dissecting it to better understand ourselves and how we view the world in that present moment. Can a language learning model really do that for our students?

Reflecting on my own experiences, I realized that writing essays had been crucial not just to meet academic standards but to understand myself.

As a current high school English teacher in my second year, I face the challenges of a changing educational landscape dominated by AI. I started the year with narrative essays, allowing students to explore their individuality. While contemplating the continued relevance of essays, I experimented with essay conferences, wondering if there were alternative ways for students to express narratives, perhaps through multimedia projects. These one-on-one conferences gave me access to students' voices. If a student suddenly sounded like a robot and overused the word "indelible," I usually had a good idea it was a bot essay.

During these conferences, I reflected on whether I was asking too much of my students, considering the discussions among other educators. Were traditional essays still necessary, or could we explore more inclusive and innovative methods that I wasn't thinking of? Surprisingly, my students embraced the narrative essay assignment, expressing genuine interest in writing about themselves. Their stories, though not always polished, revealed the richness of their experiences.

One essay highlighted the transformative power of writing. A quiet student in one of my afternoon classes shared with me a traumatic event that happened to her at a young age. The event was horrific, but as I read the essay, I turned to her and said, "Thank you for sharing this with me. I'm so sorry this happened to you." She teared up a bit and said that writing about the traumatic event had helped her process it better. Her therapist had even looked at it, and they were able to facilitate a discussion to help her healing journey outside of the class. We shared a good conversation, and then discussed ways to improve it. She took the critiques, revised the essay, and ultimately submitted a better piece of writing than she had written before. The interest in her—in her story in that moment—suddenly made writing important to her. It was an opportunity to understand herself better, and after this exchange, I knew that to beat the bot, it was a matter of understanding our students better and celebrating their ability to be vulnerable in their writing.

Despite concerns about plagiarism and reluctance from some students to engage in traditional writing assignments, the benefits of fostering genuine conversations and writing reflective essays outweigh the risks. In a world increasingly dominated by visual culture, the written word

remains a powerful tool for exploring one's identity and understanding the complexities of the world and the inner workings of a student's mind.

Writing traditional essays teaches students to develop and articulate a clear thesis, support their arguments with evidence, and address counterclaims. This process not only enhances their analytical abilities but also helps them learn to evaluate and synthesize information from various sources. It is through this rigorous intellectual exercise that students learn to present their ideas logically and persuasively. To get students to see value in this, we might need to impart the wisdom that writing is a way for their voices to be understood by themselves first, and then heard by the world. A professor of mine once wisely told me, "Nothing can replace the written word." While imaginative writing allows students to express personal experiences and emotions and even process them in a deeper level, traditional essays demand intellectual engagement and the ability to reason logically. This type of writing helps students develop a deeper understanding of the material and enhances their ability to communicate complex ideas clearly. To engage students in this process, we must first let students discover their voices in imaginative writing and choose topics that are timely, current, and will engage them in the world they currently find themselves in as technology rapidly advances and threatens to eliminate linguistic diversity and a generation of budding writers.

Generative AI might assist in generating content, but it cannot replicate the personal intellectual engagement required for writing traditional essays. It also cannot replace our students' voices, and that right there is ultimately what we should keep preserving in teaching through the *process* of writing. This reflective journey has reaffirmed my conviction that students need writing instruction not just for academic success but also for personal growth. Providing them with the sacred space to explore their thoughts and express themselves fosters not only critical thinking about the world but also self-discovery. Just as writing saved me years ago, it continues to be an indispensable tool for students navigating the challenges of today. As educators, I believe we need to remind our students that their voices, their words, do matter and are worth engaging in for creative and intellectual purposes.

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DO AS I SAY *AND* AS I DO: CREATING STRONG WRITERS BY EMPHASIZING AND MODELING THE PROCESS

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Abstract
When I was a high schooler, my knowledge of the writing process was slim, thus forcing me into a box of mediocrity. My collegiate experience has opened my eyes to my misunderstanding of drafting, revising, and editing and how that stunted me as a writer. In this reflection, I consider my lackluster methods, explore better options, and consider how I can implement these in the classroom to prevent my students from falling down the same path of comfortable stagnancy.

Keywords: composition, literacy, drafting, revising, editing, grammar, peer review, writing process, writer's notebook

Introduction

I have something exciting to share with you. I initially drafted this reflection in a *writer's notebook*! As I type this now, I am painstakingly transcribing my messy handwriting into a neat serif typeface. I know what you are thinking*, Haven, that sounds like a tedious process, and writing 10 pages by hand sounds hand-cramp-inducing!* Yes, and yes. (Send up a prayer for my left hand please.) However, it is significant to both my current writing process and the process I plan to implement in my future classroom practice. I will delve more into why I chose to go this route later in my reflection. For now, I want to share some sources I consulted to help me answer the question, how will I design instruction that helps students develop habits that enhance their writing lives?

A Look into the Past

Randy Bomer, teacher, professor, and former president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), explores this question and others in his book *Building Adolescent Literacy in Today's English Classrooms*. And I must say, as I read his chapters on the writing process, I faced an overwhelming desire to shake my freshman-in-high school self and force her to read up on drafting, revising, and editing.

After some reflection, I concluded that my successes as an English student primarily stemmed from my natural knack for writing. I can organize my thoughts in an understandable way, back them up with evidence, and frame them with an engaging hook and satisfying conclusion. Basically, it walks like an essay, it talks like an essay, it must be an essay! And sure, these were good papers, but they weren't doing anything extraordinary.

My first draft was almost always my final draft minus a *bit* of editing and implementing a fancy word or two (*immense* and *conversely*—I'm looking at you). As articulated by Bomer, I "[wrote] the text as [I thought] it should appear" (2011, p. 206). I did not stop and take the time to fully explore my ideas and become an expert on my topic. Instead, I relied on my writing process to get me the grade I wanted and to please my teacher. Bomer touches on how common this is in the lives of students and its inevitable downfall: "[I]t's simply not enough to write at the demand of a teacher in order to be judged according to how well the writer accomplished the reader's purpose.… Even those who do write well under those conditions aren't learning to be writers, just reinforcing their status as someone's student" (2011, p. 200).

All this to say, was the writing I was doing bad? I wouldn't say so. But it was formulaic and comfortable and ironically enough, it didn't require much thinking. It looked like effectively organizing my (underdeveloped) thoughts and supporting them with evidence from texts or individuals who have put in the work of developing strong stances and ideas. I used their deep thinking as a crutch to support my own lackluster process.

I think if I were to put forth the effort of drafting, revising, and editing productively, I would have surprised myself as a writer. I would have forced myself into places of discomfort which would have resulted in inevitable growth. Rather than assigning essays and hoping my students will naturally develop these skills, I need to instead implement scaffolding into my practice that helps my students sharpen their writing in a way that I never took the time to do.

Implementing and Emphasizing *the Process*

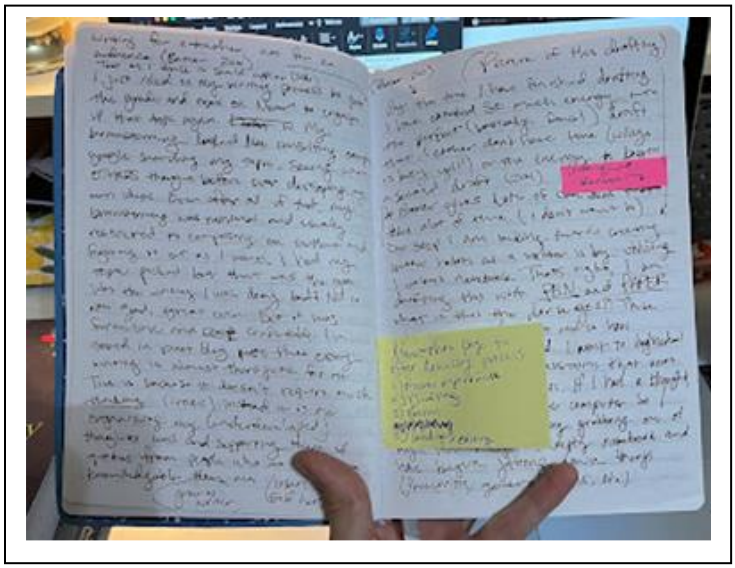
So how do I get my students to this point? How do I prevent them from developing poor writing habits that they rely on until their **senior year of college**? Well, a primary issue starts not at the beginning, but at the end. Too often, students write with the end goal being the final product, thus it becomes their primary focus. There is a lack of emphasis on the process which is essential to developing not only strong academic writing but writing lives in general. Teachers hold the responsibility of communicating this importance and encouraging students to implement it into their practice. In this excursion, it is pertinent that we give time for the students to complete this process **in class**. If we never engage in the writing process in our classroom, we are telling students that these elements are not important enough to be worthy of our precious class time. Instead, they are reduced to completion at home on their own time. We do not hold them accountable for this practice and it shifts to the wayside.

When emphasizing the process, there is a responsibility to distinguish between the elements of drafting, revision, and editing which in my practice, I have found to be used interchangeably.

Drafting

As I noted initially in this reflection, I started drafting within my newly started writer's notebook. What once was a random empty journal I had on my shelf is now *the chosen one*. And guess what: I drafted with real-life **pen and paper**! What is this the dark ages?? Many of my high school classrooms were entirely paperless so the idea of conveying all my ideas in hard copy is initially uncomfortable. But as we have established, my stunted growth as a writer is largely a result of my stubbornness to venture out of the box of my own mediocrity. I have been using this notebook to jot down a multitude of expressions (freewriting, general ideas, drafting, etc.). Because if I plan to encourage my students to participate in this activity, I better have tested it out myself! This experiment has caused me to (surprise surprise) realize how much is swimming around this little noggin of mine if I just write to think (Bomer, 2011, p. 172). I am attaching a photo of my earliest draft of this reflection, as you can see, I have added notes to myself in the margins and where space

didn't allow, added sticky notes. I also decide to switch around the order of my pages after constructing my draft.



The choice to include these pages was largely inspired by Cynthia Urbanski, a former secondary-level educator and teacher consultant for the UNC Charlotte Writing Project. In her book *Using the Workshop Approach in the High School English Classroom*, she includes the drafting process for her book within the text itself (Urbanski, 2015, p. 66).

I also have created a space that allows me to get in a proper headspace to write by hand for a long stretch of time (I'll admit, this space makes me feel like a brooding 1800s writer—really capturing my Jo March dreams). This was inspired by Randy Bomer's urging towards teachers to guide their students to consider spaces where they can be most productive (2011, pp. 58-59).

Giving students opportunities to draft through a writing notebook forces them to slow down and generate ideas. Often, it is essential for students to just *start writing*. Anne Lamott, American novelist and non-fiction writer, highlights this in her book, *Bird by Bird*: "A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft—you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft—you fix it up. You try to say what you have to say more accurately. And the third draft is the dental draft, where you check every tooth, to see if it's loose or cramped or decayed, or even, God help us, healthy" (1997, p. 2).

Revision

So, the student has a draft down. You tell them they need to revise. If they're anything like me, they will have exerted so much energy into their perfect (basically final) draft and now can't find the time or the will to revise the piece. Thankfully, Bomer provides a plethora of ideas on how to push students into productive revision (2011, p. 208). And if you have done the drafting process right, the student will not see their current writing as a perfect expression of their thoughts, but instead, something that can continue to be shaped and strengthened. It is time to stop this notion that revision means that the writing is bad and needs to be redone. As Bomer puts it, "[O]nce a text is written, it feels like punishment to have to rewrite it," and he suggests that we instead teach the writing as "reopen[ing] the text to develop content and to find the best arrangement of sections" (2011, p. 210). Revision should be exhilarating! It is a process that allows a student to delve deeper

into aspects they are excited about and develop their paper to its full potential. As Bomer notes in a section about writer's notebooks, "[they] are stuffed with little twigs of potential development" (2011, p. 192). While this quote applies to more casual writing, what if we could also help our students discover and find thrills in the vast possibilities that lay within their own writing?

Editing and Grading

Somehow, this final element seems to have become the focus and fixation of young writers and sometimes … even teachers. This is something that I fell victim to when working on my own papers or participating in peer review. Even last week in my field experience classroom, I witnessed a small group of students peer reviewing a paper together. I watched as they meticulously marked every conventional error with their multicolored pens. Every comma splice, incorrect internal citation, and grammatical error was emphasized. They spent so much time on this that they had little to no time to evaluate their peer's actual *content*—their ideas and evidence—before having to move on to the next victim.

Why did this happen? Because students are taught and consistently drilled with the idea that conventions are of the highest importance. That is what teachers continue to convey to students. Not the ideas being shared but instead the shiny box they are captured within (hence my half-baked ideas with fancy words and em-dashes squeezed by with A's). That's what I felt was important and these thoughts were continuously reinforced within me. So, instead of refining ideas and digging deeper to become an expert on a given topic, students instead focus on whether they used a colon correctly.

I am not saying that we should not hold students accountable for using standard English and following grammar rules, but that is not the whole point! In fact, these aspects don't even need to be focused on until the final stage of the writing process. It is easy to grade conventions rather than evaluate the students' ideas (which explains why it is such an easy target in peer review) but if we only focus on comma splices and spelling errors, a very small part of composing, we are failing our young writers and making writing feel inaccessible.

Final Thoughts

I want to end this reflection by highlighting a point that was made by my Theory and Practice in Composition professor: No one is *born* a writer. Every single person who writes has learned to do it. It is a technology that humans constructed to communicate with one another. Sure, some people are naturally more skilled at it than others, but like any other skill, it requires practice done frequently and intentionally. We as teachers bear the responsibility of facilitating that practice so our writers can reach their full potentials.

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PUTTING TOGETHER THE PIECES OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION: THE ROLE OF STRUCTURED LITERACY

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Abstract
Following the instructional methods of structured literacy is not entirely different from jigsaw puzzle assembly. The author reflects on similarities between effective literacy instruction and experiences assembling jigsaw puzzles. Both involve sequential, cumulative instruction; varying levels of explicit instruction; and assessment. Motivation, engagement, executive function skills, and strategy use play important parts as well.

Keywords: literacy instruction, structured literacy

Introduction

On my computer monitor stand lies a puzzle piece. Just an inch and a quarter wide knob to knob, with three knobs and one notch, it is a tiny piece, mostly bluish-green with some black lines running through. At the bottom near the left knob, there is a rounded brown shape that could be the back of a person's head. The green curves at the top knob with white above, which suggests it could be a hill. Then again, the green could be the body of a dinosaur or maybe a dragon. Of course, with just one small puzzle piece and no box with a reference picture, I truly have no clue what I possess. So, why do I keep the piece? On the back, I have written the words, "Show kids where we're going." This is why the piece stays on my computer monitor year after year.

Several years ago, Dr. Laurie Curtis, now Kansas State Department of Education's Early Literacy/Dyslexia Program Manager, then a professor in elementary education at Kansas State University, presented at one of the last conferences of the Kansas Reading Association at Emporia State University. Dr. Curtis handed each member of her audience a puzzle piece and proceeded to explain to us how the brain learns and the importance of showing students where they are headed in their learning rather than doling out piece by cryptic piece and withholding the big picture. Seeing what the bigger picture is would help me know if my puzzle piece were a hill or a dinosaur or something else. Similarly, seeing how what they are learning at any given moment fits into a bigger picture of the intended instructional goals and where they are headed can help students make sense of the lesson and connect that information to prior learning. This is one reason we are encouraged to incorporate structured literacy practices in our instruction. The explicit, sequential, cumulative instruction components allow us to show students what they are learning and how that connects with what they already know and where they are going.

Structured Literacy Instruction

Emphasizing instructional practices with significant scientific research evidence of supporting the needs of struggling readers, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) has promoted structured literacy practices as the most effective instruction for teaching students experiencing dyslexia; the IDA also deems these practices beneficial to language learners and students with broad language disabilities (2019). Structured literacy, according to the IDA, is "an approach to reading instruction where teachers carefully structure important literacy skills, concepts, and the sequence of instruction, to facilitate children's literacy learning and progress as much as possible" (IDA, 2019, p. 6). The important literacy skills referenced include phonological and orthographic skills and understanding syntax, morphology and semantics, essentially all components of Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001). The IDA (2023) developed a helpful graphic that illustrates how these skills are taught with appropriate instruction that is explicit, systematic, cumulative, highly interactive, and data driven. It is this model that I turn to when trying to explain what the science tells us about PreK-12 literacy instruction. It takes away some of the puzzling aspects about what to teach and how to teach when our students are developing literacy skills or struggling with some aspect of literacy. As I look at my family's approach to jigsaw puzzles, I realize that many connections can be made between completing a jigsaw puzzle and teaching students.

The Role of Sequential, Cumulative Instruction

I cannot imagine that many avid puzzlers started with complex puzzles of 1000 pieces or more. It is not uncommon, though, for parents and teachers to use puzzles to support fine motor and hand-eye coordination, task completion and persistence, problem-solving, sequencing, and even special vocabulary in young children (Swartz, 2018). From simple wood puzzles or those classic plastic shapes that are inserted into a ball or tub, children progress to simple jigsaws of just 25 pieces or so that create an image when assembled correctly. I remember one of the first 100-piece puzzles that I assembled and reassembled, sometimes timing myself to see if I could do it faster. I also remember when my daughter first began working on jigsaw puzzles; she would try to fit pieces together that clearly did not go together. Back then I wondered if she would ever figure out puzzles to a point where she would fall in love with them and want to complete the big ones with me. I forgot that she would need the opportunity to start small with simple puzzles with which she could experience success after some struggle and that she would need to encounter increasingly difficult yet engaging puzzles that would continue to capture her interest and challenge her as her puzzling skills improved. Like reading and writing, puzzle skill development takes time, patience, and persistence.

Our students do not walk into our classrooms with a love of books and all the skills necessary to do the hard work of learning. These skills are built gradually over time with a lot of explicit instruction in foundational literacy skills. This includes a focus on phonemic awareness which prepares students to match graphemes with phonemes as they begin decoding and encoding. Teachers introduce comprehension strategies early with modeling during read alouds and shared reading experiences. Eventually, students begin practicing comprehension strategies on their own. When teachers introduce and review the same concepts year after year, they may forget the need for providing background information or explicit instruction and modeling. I have seen teachers avoid repeating instructions or forego establishing background for fear they were boring their students, forgetting that their students did not have all the necessary pieces of information or a sense of the big picture yet. Increased focus across the country on the science of reading has led teachers back to the work of the National Reading Panel (2000). Among their findings was the effectiveness of sequential instruction in synthetic phonics programs. This and the work of Linnea Ehri (2020) and

others have pointed to the effectiveness of cumulative, sequential instruction in literacy, instruction that builds new concepts on a foundation of what is already well-established and known.

How Explicit We Need to Be Depends on Student Experience

My family and I are puzzle hoarders. If we complete a good quality puzzle with a picture we like, the puzzle is a keeper and gets worked year after year. Cats, libraries, classic Chevys, and Edward Gorey scenes are among our favorites. The first time we tackle a puzzle, we study the lines and shapes, notice unexpected patterns like colors that could be a cat or a coat or maybe water or the sky. After days of looking at the same picture to complete the puzzle the first time, my daughter has discovered the puzzle is more fun and a bit challenging the second and third time around if she completes it without the guiding picture. We work from memory, reassemble, and feel a great sense of accomplishment when we finish.

Teaching is similar. The first time we guide students through a concept, most of them need the picture, the roadmap to where they are going. Each of the small pieces of information we give students with each lesson in a unit can be too abstract on their own without a clear sense of where the learning is going. However, once they have some experience, we can begin to withhold the picture and let students discover for themselves where they are headed, now that they have some experience getting there with guidance. This is the sequential instruction found within structured literacy, often described as a gradual release of responsibility (Webb et al., 2019). A gradual release of responsibility means teachers begin by modeling a skill (I do) and then move to guided practice in which students practice the skill with partners, small groups, or the teacher (we do) before students use the skill independently (you do).

Assessment Drives It All

How did I know when my daughter was ready for more complex puzzles? How did I know she was ready to try completing puzzles without a picture to reference? I observed her work, and I listened to her. She shared with me that she wanted an additional challenge in reworking a familiar puzzle without the picture, and she completed several this way. This year when I received a new Springbok library puzzle (with cats), the image and shapes, though new, had a certain familiarity to her. She declared she did not want to use the lid, and we were off looking for patterns, colors, lines, and cats.

Knowing when our students are ready for more challenging independent work comes from similar assessment practices; structured literacy instruction is, after all, data driven. We observe students' progress and see how much they can progress independently from that "We Do" stage of instruction. We conference with students, having them verbalize strategies they are employing since so much comprehension work happens in the brain where we cannot see it. Assessments, formal and informal, are important for that stage when we become concerned that we are boring our students by providing them with unnecessary information, too. Assessments allow us to identify what pieces students hold in their hands (or maybe, metaphorically, what pieces to remind students that they have left in their desks). Through effective assessments, we can determine when students understand the bigger picture of where they are going and when they need more guidance and information.

Motivational Elements Still Matter

In the month before Christmas, my family decided to put together a lovely puzzle of two cabins in the woods, with a lot of trees, mountains, and sky in the background and a lot of water and grass in the foreground. The pieces were tiny and fairly traditionally shaped. There were elements of interest, but the deer, dog, and turkeys were each just a piece or two in size. We could not always

distinguish the water from the sky or the trees from the grass. There were no books, no cats, and my patience with the puzzle was limited. One thing that kept me going was that my daughter wanted to finish the puzzle. I had her company and help through most of the project. That did not keep me from declaring on multiple occasions, "I hate this puzzle!" Another thing that kept me going was the promise of the next puzzle, a Christmas scene in a 1950s downtown with classic Chevy cars. We had completed this one the year before, and I knew it would be fun. Even with the difficult pavement and snow-speckled sky, it promised to engage with windows in the buildings, Santa on the corner, people peering in shops, and garlands strung over the street. We successfully finished the difficult woodland scene and relished in our success; then we gleefully took it apart and grabbed the next box, our reward for a job well done.

I am fortunate to not have to complete puzzles alone. My daughter and husband share my love of puzzles and enjoy puzzling with me. As we work, we trade perspectives and alternate working from the top or bottom, organizing the pieces on an old baking sheet or the puzzle board as we go. We have learned the strategies of puzzling. We place the puzzle board on the dining room table where we can have good daylight and decent overhead lighting at night. We are always proud when we finally get the last piece in. It was especially satisfying to finish a puzzle just before winter vacation officially ended, meaning we did not have an unfinished puzzle looming in the background as we shifted our focus to other tasks.

Teaching students to be literate is not as simple as making sure they have the skills to decode, encode, and comprehend language. Gough and Tunmer (1986) proposed in their Simple View of Reading that skilled reading is the product of decoding and comprehension. Because skilled reading is a product, it requires both solid decoding and solid comprehending skills; without full development of skills in one or both areas, students do not fully develop the ability to read. Sometimes the Simple View of Reading causes teachers to oversimplify the process of learning to read and, in turn, the process of teaching reading. In their model of an Active View of Reading, Duke and Cartwright (2021) stressed the role of motivation and engagement, executive function skills, and strategies used when students are learning to read. These are not separate but integral pieces of literacy development throughout their schooling. When teaching our students to read and navigate ever more difficult texts, we also teach strategies that support this navigation.

In their model of an Active View of Reading, Duke and Cartwright (2021) stressed the role of motivation and engagement, executive function skills, and strategies used when students are learning to read.

Not all strategies work for all students in all contexts. We introduce strategies for navigating informational text, which are different from strategies for constructing meaning from narrative text. Some students take to some strategies better than others, and we help our students identify which ones work and help them make the most sense of the pieces in front of them. Sometimes, we provide support in the area of time management so that students do not become too overwhelmed with the tasks at hand, or we help students identify when it is time to abandon a book that is just not a good fit for independent reading. We help facilitate book clubs and literature circles so students can share the reading experience with their peers. As teachers, we cannot monitor all of the progress students are making as they employ strategies, so we teach them to independently monitor their understanding and employment of strategies. Knowing that not all students have the same level of skills when they walk into our classrooms, we identify texts for which they may have some background knowledge or connection that would motivate them to dive deeper, even when the text is challenging. We celebrate their accomplishments to keep moving them forward, spurring them to set higher goals for themselves and to work to achieve those goals.

Conclusion

While learning to read and solving jigsaw puzzles may share some similarities, as educators, we recognize that teaching reading should not be a puzzling prospect. Structured literacy practices guide our planning as we assess students' strengths and needs and deliver explicit, sequential, and cumulative instruction that is highly interactive and engaging for our students. We recognize that teaching reading is a matter of teaching students how to look at the big picture and put the pieces together. What we do is not easy, but each time a student lights up, revealing they understand how those pieces fit together, our work is validated. It gets even better when students choose to challenge themselves and elevate their personal goals, similar to the gratification I get from putting together new puzzles or reassembling old ones.

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THE KANSAS LITERARY CANON: A STUDY OF TEXTS TAUGHT IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH COURSES

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Abstract
Selecting diverse texts is vital for creating culturally inclusive and responsive literacy classrooms. However, despite growing student diversity and a push for multicultural literature curricular adoption, little impact has been made on secondary teacher multicultural text selection. This text selection stagnation begs further examination amidst the alarming context of a marked reading decline in U.S. classrooms wherein fewer than one-third of students entered high school as proficient readers this year (Nation's Report Card, 2022). This study uses data from recent high school graduates to unfurl text selection practices in Kansas high school English classrooms. Study results detail Kansas's most frequently taught texts, compare these texts to two previous studies, and suggest a continued homogeneity in text selection. These results demonstrate the need to understand the factors influencing text selection practices and the impact of traditional text selection on students' engagement, motivation, and learning.

Keywords: English curriculum, text selection practices, diversifying curriculum, high schools, literary canon

Introduction & Literature Review

Literacy is often positioned as the nexus of learning across disciplines. The mainstay of literacy, reading, is frequently cited as a litmus test for prosperity and societal progress worldwide. Alarmingly, recent U.S. National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) reports indicate only 32% of fourth graders and 29% of eighth graders performed at or above reading proficiency levels (Nation's Report Card [NRC], 2022). Unfortunately, Kansas NAEP data reflects this dismal trend, with only 28% scoring at or above proficient and a designation "significantly lower than National public" (NRC, 2022). More concerning, these scores show a statewide four percentage point reading decline since 2019, disquieting educators, families, and policymakers alike (National Center on Educational Statistics, 2022).

Abysmal reading comprehension scores, which demarcate only one-third of entering ninth graders as proficient readers, demand a closer look at reading instructional practices and materials. Reading comprehension involves three central elements: a reader, a text, and an activity/purpose for reading (RAND, 2002). Texts and selecting such texts are pivotal to reading instruction (Hiebert, 2017) and can impact literacy learner identity (Carter, 2007; Lee, 1993) and success (Alvermann & Commeyras, 1994; Applebee, 1993). Selecting instructional texts has long been established as one of English teachers' most important instructional decisions (Freire, 1970; Hunt, 1996; Northrop et al., 2019). Now more than ever, the selection of diverse and multicultural texts has been lauded as a pedagogical gateway to multicultural education and a high-leverage instructional practice for

underserved and striving readers (Bishop, 1990; Boyd, 2017; Flores et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2011; Jogie, 2015; Kelly et al., 2021).

However, even as the PK-12 U.S. student population grows increasingly diverse, the teaching force has remained stagnant regarding cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity (Egalite et al., 2015), wherein 80% of teachers are white (NCES, 2019) compared to less than 50% of U.S. students (NCES, 2019; Schaeffer, 2021). Bolstered by mounting evidence that this teacher/student cultural mismatch contributes to gaps in academic achievement for diverse students, the proximate need to develop teachers who are culturally responsive and agentive has never been greater (Carter Andrews, 2021; Gershenson et al., 2022; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt, 2018). Though culturally responsive literacy teaching, centering students' varied and intersecting cultural identities as classroom assets to embolden literacy and academic success (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995), is a promising pedagogical practice, literacy teachers must be intentionally trained in and implement humanizing, asset-based pedagogies to realize the positive impacts of this work (Kwok et al., 2020, 2022; Rios et al., 2024). Without intentional, immersive training and tools that center diverse identities and cultures across teaching and curriculum, continued negative impacts on student outcomes and teacher success are likely (Egalite et al., 2015; Souto-Manning, 2021; Villegas & Irvine, 2010;).

Despite increasing student diversity and a three-decade push for multicultural literature curricular adoption (Bishop, 1990), little impact has been made on the texts teachers select for classroom use in over a hundred years (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). In fact, in direct contrast to the diverse learners they serve, most titles teachers select for instruction are written by white men from an Anglo-Saxon tradition, the same texts they likely read as students (Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Hale & Crowe, 2001). And, while there has been some reported growth in diverse text selection practices by novice educators, the traditional canon still holds the greatest sway in curriculum, especially with experienced teachers (Applebee, 1992; Ervin, 2022; Perry, 2013). Indeed, calls for large-scale curricular book reform and diversification have gone long unanswered, likely due to such barriers as (1) limitations of standardized curriculum and high-stakes state assessments (Avalos et al., 2020); (2) teachers' limited knowledge of diverse texts and those outside of those within their own educational experiences (Friese et al., 2008); (3) resource limitations present (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015); and (4) sociopolitical tensions from communities and families (Ervin, 2022).

Despite increasing student diversity and a three-decade push for multicultural literature curricular adoption (Bishop, 1990), little impact has been made on the texts teachers select for classroom use in over a hundred years (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015).

Text selection in Kansas high school English classrooms is complicated by the "reemergence of concern with content and approaches" for teaching literature in K-12 schools (Applebee, 1989, p. 1). While secondary schools have not been explicitly or exclusively targeted by sweeping national and state-wide book bans, high school English classrooms often feature book-length texts rich with characters, plots, and circumstances rich with complexity, nuance, and challenges demanding reflection, debate, or empathy (Rehn, 2023; Perrillo & Newman, 2023). This curricular complexity makes high school English classrooms the perfect setting for sociopolitical culture wars and positions high school English teachers as unwilling subjects of "educational intimidation" and "educational gag orders", resulting in a record high of 3,362 book bans in the past year (Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009; PEN America, 2023). In Kansas particularly, PEN America reports seven official book bans to 94 distinct titles within cities such as Gardner, Goddard, Leavenworth, Topeka, and Wichita, most frequently citing inappropriate sexually explicit content and offensive language as

reasons for bans (PEN America, 2023). Disproportionately, these bans target books on race or racism, feature characters of color, experiences of LGBTQ+ characters, topics of abuse, health, and wellbeing, and/or themes of grief and death (PEN America, 2023). Though the resurgence of widespread bans is relatively new, the chilling effects of these practices on curricular decision-making, like teacher book-length text selection, cannot be overstated.

Though strategic book bans from coordinated groups like *Moms for Liberty* make it seem that full-length texts in high school English classrooms are wholly salacious and avant-garde, previous studies on full-length texts in high school English classrooms tell a different story. Applebee's (1989) national survey of book-length high school English works reflects a homogenous canon in his description of the top 10 taught titles, most frequently taught authors, and grade levels in which the texts were taught. The titles and authors remained the same across public, private, and independent school settings. Additionally, there was a considerable range in the grade levels in which the titles were taught, wherein many texts were taught across multiple grades. Finally, the top titles were compared with a study conducted in 1963 (Anderson, 1964), which established canon continuity, Shakespeare's dominance, and the alarming lack of female and multicultural authorship. Notably, Applebee (1989) described a canonical shift to incorporate more contemporary texts but also countered that these dubbed "contemporary texts" were at least 40 years old.

Positioned in the current political context as a three-decades-later follow-up to Applebee's (1989) inquiry, this study seeks to understand what book-length texts are taught in Kansas high schools. This work is of merit due to the lack of statewide information about text-selection practices and the established connection between text selection and student interest and motivation for reading (Guthrie, 2002; Robertson & Padesky, 2020; Tan & Mante-Estacio, 2021). Specifically, the study is notable as it focuses on the results of teacher text selection decisions in practice rather than merely on the criteria and guidelines for doing so (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Moreover, reporting statewide book-length text selection practices and comparing these with historical data holds practical and policy development potential. This study seeks to portray the top texts taught in Kansas and the types of texts selected (e.g. multicultural, contemporary, traditional), and compare these with previous book-length text reporting from the past thirty years. We examine this concept with two research questions: What are current book-length text selection practices in Kansas high school English classrooms? How do these practices compare with reported text selection practices from decades past?

Methods

Data Selection and Collection

Survey data was collected from a recruitment pool of recent high school graduates enrolled as university students within a sizeable Kansas land-grant institution. The survey was delivered electronically using university bulk email lists of college Kansas students representing various communities from across the state to inquire about their experiences with book-length, whole-class texts in their high school English classrooms. Responses were solicited from college-aged Kansas students instead of Kansas teachers or school districts to protect Kansas English teachers from experiencing possible or additional feelings of educational surveillance and intimidation. Researchers collected data via an anonymous electronic survey in Qualtrics distributed via student listserv in alignment with IRB approval. Participation was encouraged with randomized prize drawings of student-friendly incentives with contact information entered via a separate secondary survey platform connected only by a link. The survey was designed to take less than 10 minutes to reduce participant fatigue and encourage persistence. In total, 147 participant responses were collected, and 136 were completed and included for final analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative descriptive analyses were conducted to describe, summarize, and establish patterns within the collected text selection data (Loeb et al., 2017). First, mirroring Applebee's (1989) previous analyses, the lists of taught titles and author information frequencies were used to describe and summarize current book-length texts and compare trends and differences against previous findings. Listed text frequency data were further compared to Applebee's (1989) and Anderson's (1964) previous text frequency research using two-proportion z-tests to determine the statistical significance of changes in text frequency at a $p < .05$ significance level.

Second, to extend these analyses, 11th and 12th-grade texts were coded according to four categories: traditional (published before World War II); contemporary (after World War II), diverse text (both author and characters are from multicultural backgrounds), or diverse characters (white author but characters are from multicultural background). For our purposes, diverse texts are described as texts about or by individuals who have been marginalized and are considered outside the mainstream of society, including individuals from diverse cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds (Salas et al., 2002; Yokota, 2001).

Findings

The findings of the study are displayed in two sections. The first section describes text and authorship frequencies and compares two previous studies. The second section investigates and portrays text type categorization in the 11th and 12th grades.

Book-Length Text Frequencies and Trends

Findings suggest a continued need for more diversity in text selection. Across 9-12th grade, participants listed 483 total and 203 discrete book-length texts. An evaluation of the top 20 texts assigned suggests a continued homogeneity of text selection: 100% were written by white authors, with 90% being from American or British lineage. Men wrote eighty-five percent of the top-taught texts, but a female author wrote the most frequently taught text, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* listed by 93 (68%) of participants. Shakespeare was the most taught author, and dramas of *Romeo and Juliet* (91, 67%), *Macbeth* (31, 23%), *Hamlet* (21, 18%), and *Julius Caesar* (12, 9%) comprised 158 (33%) of the total taught texts. Texts centering diverse authors, characters, and/or geographically diverse settings were fully absent from the top 20 texts assigned, save Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which portrays the real-life horrors of the Holocaust. Multiple texts were listed and read across grade levels, especially *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Lord of the Flies, Of Mice and Men,* and *Macbeth*. The full list of the top 20 texts across grade levels is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Top 20 most assigned texts in Kansas 9-12th grade high school English classrooms

Top 20 Most Popular *(in descending order)*	**Frequency** (instances, overall percentage)	**Text Title**	**Author race/ethnicity**	**Author gender**	**Author geographic heritage**
1	93 (68%)	*To Kill a Mockingbird*	White	Female	American
2	91 (67%)	*Romeo and Juliet*	White	Male	British
3	62 (46%)	*The Great Gatsby*	White	Male	American
4	42 (31%)	*Fahrenheit 451*	White	Male	American

Top 20 Most Popular *(in descending order)*	**Frequency** (instances, overall percentage)	**Text Title**	**Author race/ethnicity**	**Author gender**	**Author geographic heritage**
5	38 (28%)	*Lord of the Flies*	White	Male	British
6	38 (28%)	*Of Mice and Men*	White	Male	American
7	31 (23%)	*Macbeth*	White	Male	British
8	29 (21%)	*The Crucible*	White	Male	American
9	24 (18%)	*Hamlet*	White	Male	British
10	23 (17%)	*1984*	White	Male	British
11	21 (15%)	*The Scarlet Letter*	White	Male	American
12	20 (15%)	*Animal Farm*	White	Male	British
13	18 (13%)	*The Odyssey*	White	Male	Greek
14	14 (10%)	*Night*	White	Male	Romanian American
15	13 (10%)	*Frankenstein*	White	Female	British
16	12 (9%)	*Julius Caesar*	White	Male	British
17	9 (7%)	*Speak*	White	Female	American
18	8 (6%)	*Huckleberry Finn*	White	Male	American
19	7 (5%)	*Hatchet*	White	Male	American
20	7 (5%)	*Grapes of Wrath*	White	Male	American

n (total participants) =136

The data from this study affords noteworthy comparisons to the results of Applebee's (1989) and Anderson's (1964) most frequently listed high school text results. For example, as shown in Table 2, all but two texts, *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984* appear on all three top-10 lists. These two texts were likely not included in the earlier two studies due to their relative recency in publication, respectively, in 1959 and 1949. Of the eight texts on all three lists, only *Hamlet* was taught at a frequency that was not statistically significant from 1964 to 2023. Five listed texts, annotated with the asterisk (*) and addition (+) symbols, were listed at a percentage significantly different from the 1989 and 1964 samples. Marked declines in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* and marked increases in teaching *The Great Gatsby, Lord of the Flies, Of Mice and Men,* and *The Crucible* were observed from 1964 to 2023. Statistically significant differences in frequency between 1989 and 2023 were seen in the decreased reading of *Romeo and Juliet, The Great Gatsby,* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, along with the uptake of *1984* and *Fahrenheit 451*. Remarkably, two texts that made the 2023 top-20 list, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth,* were among the top 10 most widely taught texts at the beginning of the 20th century (Tanner, 1907).

Table 2. Frequency comparison of 2023 top taught Kansas texts to Applebee (1989) & Anderson's (1964) national evaluations

Top 10 *(in descending order)*	**Text Title**	**Rios (2023) Frequency** *(overall percentage)*	**Applebee (1989) Frequency** *(overall percentage)*	**Anderson (1964) Frequency** *(overall percentage)*
1	*To Kill a Mockingbird*	68%*+	74%	8%
2	*Romeo and Juliet*	67%*+	90%	14%
3	*The Great Gatsby*	46%*+	54%	<5%
4	*Fahrenheit 451*	31%*+	Not listed	Not listed
5	*Lord of the Flies*	28%+	56%	<5%
6	*Of Mice and Men*	28%+	60%	<5%
7	*Macbeth*	23%+	81%	90%
8	*The Crucible*	21%+	47%	<5%
9	*Hamlet*	18%	56%	33%
10	*1984*	17%*+	Not listed	Not listed

n (2023) = 136 participants
n (1988) = 322 participants
n (1963) = 222 participants
*Percentage significantly different from 1988 sample, $p < .05$
+Percentage significantly different from 1963 sample, $p < .05$

Text Categorization of 11th and 12th grade texts

Categorically, listed texts were grouped into two distinct codes and two cross-cutting codes. The first code, traditional texts, describe texts written before World War II (Rybaokva & Roccanti, 2016). The second code, contemporary, describes texts written after World War II. The first cross-cutting code, diverse texts, describes texts (contemporary or traditional) written by multicultural authors about multicultural characters, places, or experiences. The second cross-cutting code, diverse characters, describes texts (contemporary or traditional) featuring multicultural characters written by white authors. Categorically, the top-20 texts are 60% traditional and 40% contemporary. As for the cross-cutting codes, one contemporary text (5%) of the top-20 could be described as a "diverse text" as it was written by a multicultural author and centered on a diverse character perspective and experience.

Featuring largely American literature and authors, the 269 reported 11th-grade texts follow similar trends, with 181 (67%) categorized as traditional, 88 (33%) as contemporary, 17 (6%) as diverse texts, and 4 (1%) as featuring diverse characters. The 223 reported 12th grade text categories most closely mirror the ratios of the top-20 wherein 137 (61%) of texts are traditional, 86 (39%) are contemporary, 17 (8%) are diverse texts, and 5 (2%) center diverse characters. Both between grade levels and compared to the top 20 overall, text ratios are consistent across categories. Moreover, there needs to be more representation of diverse authors, characters, and perspectives must be

represented in every grouping or grade level. Finally, though over one-third of texts were coded as contemporary, less than 10% of the top 20 texts were written in the last thirty years, with none written in the previous two decades.

Table 3. Categories of 11th and 12th grade texts

Grade Level	Distinct Codes		Cross-Cutting Codes	
	Traditional *(frequency and percentage)*	**Contemporary** *(frequency and percentage)*	**Diverse text** *(frequency and percentage*	**Diverse characters** *(frequency and percentage*
11th	181 (67%)	88 (33%)	17 (6%)	4 (1%)
12th	137 (61%)	86 (39%)	17 (8%)	5 (2%)

n (11th grade responses) = 269
n (12th grade responses) = 223

Discussion

Results from this study depict a high school literary landscape replete with text stagnation and canonical monoculturalism. Yet again, most reported texts are well over fifty years old and written by white men from an Anglo-Saxon tradition in the United States or Great Britain. Beyond this, the reported canon was primarily written for an adult audience, evidenced by their centering on adult main characters. Secondary English texts should be attentive to and representative of students' diverse identities, and they should also be responsive to adolescent students' interests and motivations (Bishop, 1990).

Lee's (1993) research suggests monocultural and racially exclusive text selection disadvantages diverse and marginalized students because their cultural, social, and linguistic identities are at odds with the texts they are required to read. Furthermore, additional research describes the negative impacts of a too-heavy reliance on British literature—termed "all that crazy White stuff" by student participants—on racially marginalized students' identities, voices, and success in a high school English classroom (Carter, 2007). Dyches's (2017) work proposes cultivating and creating a canonical counter-curriculum that develops students' sociopolitical consciousness, affords ways to talk back to traditional canonical literature, and engenders culturally responsive instruction. Especially amidst an ever-diversifying Kansas state student population, marked shifts must occur to diversify the Kansas high school canon to make it more representative of the students in our classroom and their interests and identities (Robertson & Padesky, 2020; Yang, 2022).

Moreover, while diversifying teachers' text selection is necessary, as previously cited, time, finances, resources, and support barriers exist to realize this effort. Especially within an unprecedented teacher shortage and the overabundance of novice educators with less teacher preparation (Nguyen, 2022; Redding & Henry, 2018), additional curricular and pedagogical resources are needed to aid teachers in diversifying their curriculum and teaching practices (Kwok, 2022; Pak et al., 2020). Additionally, while the selection of diverse texts is one facet of engaging in curricular diversification (Henderson et al., 2020) and culturally responsive literacy instruction, the act of selecting a multicultural text itself may not correlate to widespread instructional shifts toward equity and diversity in the English classroom (Farinde-Wu, 2017; Gere, 2009). Thus, to better facilitate a

teacher's uptake of a culturally responsive stance, teachers must be provided with tangible support and resources to empower widespread curricular and instructional shifts (Ladson-Billings, 2023; Rios et al., 2024; Sharma & Christ, 2017).

The results of this study are limited by the survey results' self-reported nature, the participant pool's relative size, and the singular location of the data collection. Future research should broaden participant recruitment and gather additional responses to offer greater reliability and credibility of the findings. Further research should include teachers' perspectives on text selection practices and explore students' considerations of these texts in high school classrooms. Better understanding students' responses to text selection can help teachers and future teachers make better-informed decisions to nurture student engagement and interest in literacy, thereby cultivating student achievement.

Implications

The need to diversify the high school literature canon holds many implications for stakeholders in English teacher education, teaching, and learning. To begin, teacher preparation programs should consider the opportunity that young adult literature courses provide to infuse issues of diverse text selection. Including diverse texts within these courses is standard, but including information about diverse text selection processes, such as publishing industry diversification information, equity bookshelf audits, principles for selecting diverse texts, and text censorship information, is critical. Second, teachers need access to free and valuable resources to choose and teach diverse texts within our current fraught sociopolitical context. The following resources might hold promise for classroom English teachers on topics of text selection and censorship: (1) National Council of Teachers of English's Intellectual Freedom Center with resources about text selection and censorship; (2) #DisruptTexts guides that challenge the traditional canon; (3) Teaching Books Diverse Books Toolkit, which includes lists of diverse books by cultural identity, subject, genre, grade level, and more; (4) DiverseBook Finder for a book search database focused solely on multicultural children's books; (5) Pen America's resources to challenge book bans and legislation. Together, we can encourage text diversification efforts in our high school English classrooms to impact student learning motivation and humanize spaces for each student in Kansas.

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PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE: AUTHOR JANAE MARKS ENCOURAGES YOUNG READERS AND WRITERS AT THE 2023 LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Kevin B. Kienholz
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Abstract
On October 4, 2023, author Janae Marks served as the featured writer at the Literature Festival in Topeka, Kansas. Held annually on the campus of Washburn University, the Literature Festival brings together young readers, their teachers, and authors in an effort to celebrate and promote reading and young readers. In this interview conducted during the Literature Festival, Marks discussed a variety of topics on the subject of literature written for young readers, including the importance of storytelling in the lives of students as well as the challenges and rewards related to writing for an audience of young readers. Over the course of her time at the Literature Festival, Marks emphasized the importance of persistence and patience in the life of a writer, and she encouraged young readers to explore a wide range of genres in order to continue to grow throughout their reading lives.

Keywords: Janae Marks, *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*, persistence, storytelling, young readers, The Literature Festival

As the featured writer for the 2023 Literature Festival, writer Janae Marks spent an entire day on the campus of Washburn University with approximately 175 middle school students and 30 teachers from Topeka and the surrounding area. The author of *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* and other popular novels written for young readers, Marks opened the day's events with a presentation in which she explained her writing process, passed along advice for the aspiring young writers in attendance, and talked about two of the most crucial qualities that she believes writers must cultivate. Over the course of the entire day, students had the opportunity to listen to Marks' presentation, engage in an open Question-and-Answer forum, and even meet the author (which, naturally, involved snagging autographs and snapping selfies). While Marks was clearly the center of attention at this year's Literature Festival, as always, the overarching focus was on celebrating both the books that are written for young readers as well as those young readers themselves—readers who are keeping the love of books alive and well around the state of Kansas.

Those familiar with *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* might recall that the titular character harbors a dream of becoming a pastry chef, so it was a natural step for Marks to remind the students in attendance that writing and baking share some important qualities: Marks pointed out that

carefully crafted outlines function in many of the same ways that recipes do, providing writers with an overall framework that *guides*, but doesn't dictate, creativity. Both writing and baking involve, as anyone who practices either discipline would tell you, a fair amount of trial and error. And at the end of both processes, you hope to end up with something that everyone can savor and enjoy. This last step proved to be the case for the readers of *Zoe Washington*, as the students in attendance enthusiastically discussed their reading of Marks' novel in small groups and asked plenty of insightful questions about it when they had their chance in the Q&A sessions.

On that same theme of the link between writing and baking, Marks' comments returned time and time again to two qualities that both writers and bakers must possess: Patience and Persistence. Marks noted that she tends to write about characters who have big dreams—and when it comes to both aspirations as well as great baking, we know that they both can take time to come to fruition. Marks connected these themes when talking about her own journey as a writer, noting that even though she wrote her first complete manuscript in 2008, she didn't land her first book deal until 2018, and it wasn't until 2020 that *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* was finally published. Patience and persistence, indeed. Marks reminded the young readers in the audience that both baking and writing take time, involve false starts, and require one to build out from those failures. In a nutshell, she urged the students to "Hone your grit."

At the end of a day in which Marks spent nearly six hours visiting with the young readers in attendance, she was kind enough to sit down for an interview in which we covered topics that ranged from the challenges and rewards of writing for young readers, to how a writer for young readers balances seriousness with accessibility, to the importance of storytelling in the lives of today's middle schoolers. That interview, lightly edited for clarity and concision, follows:

Kienholz: We know that young readers are a fascinating and challenging audience—capable and really demanding. What do you find challenging and what do you find rewarding about writing for middle schoolers?
Marks: Well, what I find rewarding, for sure, is their excitement level around books. When they become excited about reading, it's so high. Even just today [at the Literature Festival], you see kids so excited to get a book signed or to meet their favorite author. While the love for reading continues on into adulthood, I just don't think that same level of enthusiasm exists. You know, you get a little more jaded as you grow up, and I think it's just such an exciting time for them [younger readers]. There are so many changes they're going through. I think I just enjoy writing about some of those things, too, so I think that's really getting a chance to help kids feel less alone in what they're going through or make them feel like they have something they can go to when they feel like they need an escape. I think it's really rewarding because they have a lot of stressors they're dealing with, too, even at that age. I think what can be hard is I'm obviously not a child anymore, so I think just making sure that I can stay relevant and know what kids are thinking about and just keep trying to write things that are going to stand the test of time—I think it can be challenging. So, when I am thinking of ideas, I want to make sure that this is going to be something that kids are going to really relate to and that I am not just trying to put my adult perspective on them.

Kienholz: *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* invites readers to wrestle with important, complex issues like justice and persistence. Would you speak to your sense of why these are crucial topics for an audience of young readers to grapple with?
Marks: I think a lot of kids this age are grappling with it already, just in the world. I think kids this age, due to social media and the internet, are exposed to a lot more of these things and a lot more of these thoughts or may even just be experiencing some of them in their own hometown or in their own families that they're already engaging with these topics. I think what a lot of adults are worried

about is giving kids books with these heavier themes or they're feeling like they want to shield them, but a lot of the kids are already living them. One of the statistics I read when I was researching *Zoe Washington* was that one in every 27 children in the United States has a parent in prison. It's a lot more than I ever would have thought. But if that is already what kids are dealing with at a really young age, then why shouldn't they have a book that allows them to kind of try to process some of these things and maybe feel less alone in their experiences? Or if it's not their experience, then we learn about what other kids are going through. I think kids are already engaging with a lot of social justice issues these days. A lot of kids are really getting involved. You can see there are a lot of kid activists out there. To me, I feel like it's already what's going on, and so it really makes sense that a book should reflect that—you know, what kids are thinking about. And they're worried…. So when they get to read about kids trying to, you know, engage with those topics, I think it helps them feel like, *OK, this book is something that I can relate to because I care about these things, too.*

Kienholz: We know representation is important in literature written for young readers. How do you think about that in your writing as an author who's writing for an audience of middle schoolers?
Marks: I think the conversation of representation in children's books kind of started before I was even published, so I was already thinking about it before I even got a book deal. There's that organization, We Need Diverse Books, that really put the conversation into a lot of people's minds about why we really need to have inclusion—and not just race, but all kinds of diversity. I was already thinking about that and it kind of made me feel like, alright, I know, as a person of Color myself, I really did want to write about characters who look like me. Especially when I looked back at the books I read as a kid, there wasn't a ton of diversity. And it was the norm, so I didn't really think about it back then at all…. But now there's an opportunity to do that and the publishers fortunately were wanting to help do that now. And so, I think that for me it was a priority from the beginning of writing the *Zoe Washington* books. Because in the past, I think my previous books, I wasn't really thinking too much about it…. I think it just became a priority for me because I was thinking about, my own self as a kid, what I wish I could have read more of. And also, you know, my own kid or other kids that I'm seeing around me, like they deserve to see themselves as the heroes. You know, they deserve to see themselves as the person going on the adventure, if it's that kind of story, and not just the sidekick. And also, I was just really excited to see that other authors were already doing it before my book even came out.

Kienholz: What's your sense of the importance of storytelling in the lives of readers today?
Marks: I think storytelling or getting to read stories, for one, could be an escape. It could be a fun escape. I think that there's so much going on in the world that's stressful that, for me, reading is just a great way to turn it all off and just get into a story that you're really into and, you know, really connect with these characters. So, I think that for kids not only is it good for them because they need to learn how to become better readers, but also just for the fun of it. Obviously, storytelling has been part of culture—being human—forever.... I think it's just a really great way for kids to be able to process their feelings. Going back to tough topics, I think it's a really great way for parents and teachers to introduce tough topics to their kids because they can really process it through this fictional story.... So, I just think this is a great way for kids to feel, to really process our world.... I think that's why we need to have stories—and not only just stories, but going back to the earlier question, a *diverse* set of stories.

Kienholz: I imagine you get asked quite often about advice for young *writers*, which you did address in the session to begin the day. But I was wondering if you might have some advice for young *readers* when it comes to building an interesting reading life.

Marks: I think that it's about trying to read what you enjoy. It's meant to be fun.... I'm alright with whatever format you want. A lot of people enjoy verse novels because they feel like a verse novel is a little less intimidating because there's a lot more white space on the page. So, I think whatever book you want to read, it doesn't matter to me what format it is. Even audio books. It's still listening and absorbing the story. But then once you get into reading, once you've figured out what your favorite thing is, stretch yourself. Try other books.... Once you find your favorite genre, switch it up sometimes. I think another part of being into books is to engage with your community of book lovers. I feel like it's such a fun thing to be able to chat with your friends about books. In school that could just be your friends in your classroom. It doesn't necessarily have to be joining a book club, but it can be.... Share your love of books with others and become friends with people through that because it's so fun to chat about your favorite books with people. I would say stretch yourself. Try different genres. Maybe even try different formats—listen to an audiobook or maybe try a graphic novel if you normally weren't into that. And then maybe find community. That will keep you motivated to want to read even more. And support your local independent bookstores and your libraries. That's really important.

After listening to Janae Marks throughout the day at the Literature Festival and after having the chance to visit during this interview, it became readily apparent that she sees potential energy in both the books young people read as well as the young people themselves. That is, books possess a *kinetic energy* that has the power to build empathy and understanding in their readers, and in turn those readers can go out to change the world. While she incorporates those big dreams and aspirations into the lives of the characters she creates, she clearly encourages her readers to build those same hopes and goals into their own lives. At one point during her presentation, Marks revealed that it was actually her readers who prompted her to write the follow-up novel to *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*—a powerful nudge from the young readers who love her books and a good reminder that honing your grit can pay real-world dividends.

Toward the end of the interview, our conversation turned to the recent spate of book challenges that have occurred across the country in unprecedented numbers, and Marks once again took a moment to remind adult readers that they, too, have agency and can make a difference, just like her young readers: "If you know that there is a book being challenged in your area, go to the meeting and stay and give your feedback about it. Use your voice. I think it's just getting to the point where all the other people who want to ban the books are using their voices and being loud in those meetings. We need more people who are against the banning to do the same." In other words, *hone your grit* and be persistent in the face of those who are looking to limit the books available for young readers.

Throughout the entirety of the Literature Festival, Marks continually reminded her young readers to "Keep going," returning to those twin themes of Persistence and Patience. And while her advice might have been couched as words of wisdom for aspiring writers, it also sounded like wise counsel that could find application for those in attendance who might find themselves in front of the keyboard in search of an idea, in front of a classroom full of students, in a kitchen trying to perfect a new dessert, in a discussion about banning a book, or just in life, generally. "Keep going," Marks says. "You'll get there."

Author Biography

Kevin Kienholz is a professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Emporia State University. At ESU, he is the English BSE program coordinator, and he works primarily with students who are preparing for a career in the middle/high school English language arts classroom. He can be reached at kkienhol@emporia.edu.

DRIVING THROUGH THE NIGHT TO GET HOME

Dave Malone

Near a forest grove
on the two-lane,
I come to a full stop.

My car splits the small
deer herd—lithe bodies,
big eyes—on respective sides
of the white-lined highway.

In the headlamp and waxing
crescent light, we stare
at each other for a few moments,
wondering what just happened.

Such strange night noise approaching
then halting to a hum during an evening
forage for crimson clover and poke greens.
I am less inquisitive than they though

my satchel flew from front seat
to floor in an instant. I drove slowly
for them, for me, for this small prayer
in the field, at this table, lit by the stars.

FIRST SNOW AT THE BODY SHOP

Dave Malone

Few people in town know I'm a writer.
I like it that way. Their slow, beautiful
lives are safe from my eye, ink, screen.

But the guys at the body shop know
and treat me like an honored guest
when I pull up with a broken fender,

a busted hubcap. On a frenzied Friday
afternoon, it's a headlight decapitated
by a cedar limb spear. Even the mayor

shows with his Lincoln Navigator,
driver door bent on a bender.
The boys usher him out

into the snowstorm and gather to hear
about my latest play, how a boxer
can make do with a tough stepson

at Christmas. How twinkle lights shine
with the grace of Manny Pacquiao,
like the season's first snow.

BUCKET CALF

Dave Malone

I won't think of you embalmed.
Instead, I'll pretend that your family
had you cremated, and coils
of dark smoke rose up,

mixed with cirrus clouds far above
the crematorium. Twenty years ago,
you sat in the last row
of my composition class.

Your red hair spoke for you,
a shy girl who kept a secret
from all of us. You visit me often
when I'm stopped after work

by the train that rattles
through the middle of town.
The iron wheels churn,
and their wind shakes my little car,

sending me back to raise
the shuttered windows
of our classroom, where you
wrote essays about 4-H and winter.

How you struggled once
to put a calf down,
but it was yours to care for,
and it had to be you.

Author Biography

Dave Malone spent his early childhood in Riley, Kansas, and later graduated from Olathe North High School. Dave holds degrees from Ottawa University and Indiana State University. In a past life, he taught courses in composition and film. He is the author of eight collections of poetry and enjoys giving readings. He currently lives in West Plains, Missouri. You can find him online at *davemalone.net* or on Instagram @*dave.malone*. Contact him at davemaloneauthor@gmail.com.

REVISING WRITING ASSESSMENTS IN RESPONSE TO GENERATIVE AI

Carrie Dickison
Wichita State University

Abstract
The author describes how she revised writing assessments in the university's first-year writing sequence to emphasize rhetorical analysis of multimodal texts, prompts to which generative AI and ChatGPT struggle to respond.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, AI, writing assessments, ChatGPT, first-year composition, comparative analysis, multimodal texts

Like many writing teachers, I have been spending a lot of time thinking about how to respond to advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI). One of my responsibilities at Wichita State University is overseeing English 102, the second course in our first-year writing sequence. As we entered fall 2023, I was especially concerned about the final exam for the online version of this class.

Historically, the exam asked students to write a timed essay responding to one of three quotations, and the results were scored with a rubric based on the six traits of writing. This data was used for programmatic assessment as well as university accreditation. In online sections of the course, students took the final exam through our learning management system. The exam was timed but not proctored, making it relatively easy for students to submit AI-generated output instead of their own writing. In summer 2023, we noticed that many online students' final exams exhibited hallmarks of AI-generated writing—high technical proficiency despite the limited time frame, a formulaic five-paragraph structure, and little sense of the student's own voice. It was clearly time to rethink the exam.

Instead of doubling-down on student surveillance via online proctoring services or AI-checking software, I put together a team of instructors to help me redesign the exam. Through experimentation, we discovered that ChatGPT struggled with prompts asking it to analyze multimodal texts, especially if the texts had not received media attention. From previous experience working with ChatGPT, we also knew that it struggled with comparing texts. With this information, we set out to redesign the exam around a comparative analysis of recent advertisements.

In its final form, the revised exam asked students to compare two advertisements for a similar product. To encourage student choice, each version of the exam offered three options: a set of video advertisements, a set of print advertisements, and a set of audio advertisements. For example, one version of the exam asked students to compare two video advertisements for different credit cards, two print advertisements for different brands of dog food, or two audio advertisements for local car dealerships.

The revised exam also provided us with an opportunity to reinforce other course content. English 102 includes a unit on rhetorical analysis, in which students analyze how *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* are used in different texts. The new exam encouraged students to draw on what they learned

during this unit and discuss the rhetorical strategies used in each advertisement. We also revised the exam rubric to reflect the new format and emphasis on rhetorical analysis.

In fall 2023, we piloted the redesigned final exam in eight sections of ENGL 102, with exciting results. Both students and instructors felt that the new exam was more relevant to the course content, and instructors reported receiving more authentic and engaged writing. By privileging the kinds of thinking and writing that generative AI struggles with, we ended up creating a better assessment of students' writing.

Author Biography

Carrie Dickison is an Associate Teaching Professor and Assistant Director of the Writing Program at Wichita State University, where she teaches classes in composition and literature. Her research interests include online writing instruction, multimodal writing, and accessibility. She can be reached at carrie.dickison@wichita.edu.

MLA CITATION DISSECTIONS

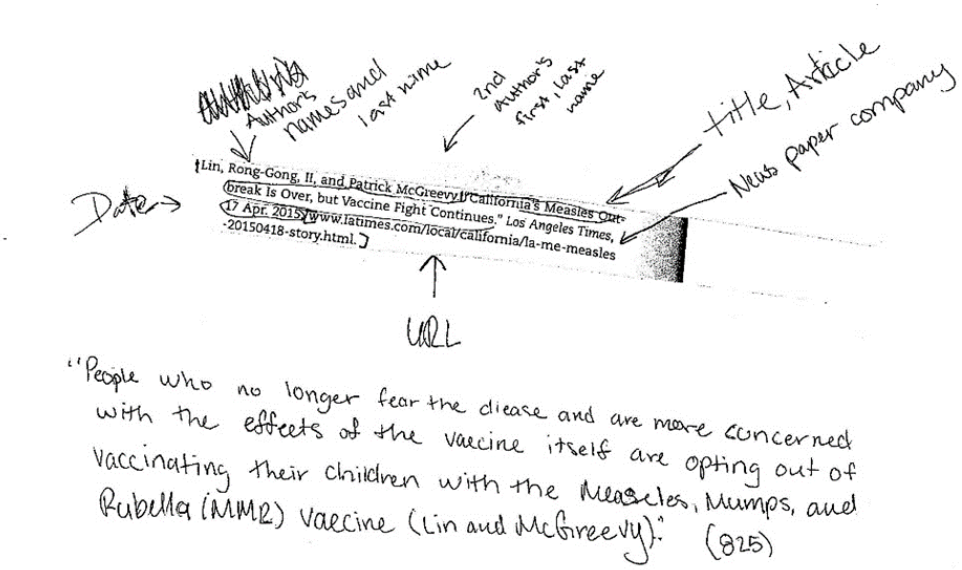
Beth Gulley
Johnson County Community College

Abstract
The author describes an instructional strategy that deepens students' understanding of the elements of in-text and works cited page citation elements in an age of citation makers.

Keywords: works cited, references, citation makers, in-text citations, reading citations

In recent semesters, students in my first-year college writing courses have come to depend on citation makers such as EasyBib and Citation Machine instead of writing their own MLA citations. The same could be said about APA. This situation is citation style agnostic. The online citation makers have improved so much that it is hard to fault students for using them. In fact, students who do use them often create better in-text and works cited page citations. One unintended consequence of the rise of citation makers is that students are less familiar with what each element of the citation means and that knowing how to read the citations could help with their own research.

One strategy I have used with my students is something I call MLA Citation Dissections. I give small groups of students a works cited entry from an essay they read the night before. Next, I remind them of the section of the textbook that explains what each element of the citation corresponds to. For example, normally the first item is the first author's last name. Items in italics are titles of some sort, and so on. Then students need identify what sort of source the citation in front of them is, and then to label each element.



*Student example courtesy of Mia Villamar

After students have successfully labeled each element, they go back to the essay and find the spot inside the text where the author refers to the text. They write the quote, paraphrase, summary, and/or statistics under the dissected citation. Then they note whether the author quoted or used the source in some other way.

This exercise encourages students to use their textbook as well as to notice what kind of sources the essay author has used and how they have used them. While students continue to use citations makers, they at least have more understanding of what they are copying and pasting into their works cited pages.

Author Biography

Beth Gulley teaches first-year writing at Johnson County Community College. She has a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Kansas. Her research interests include active learning techniques and international education. She can be reached at bgulley@jccc.edu.

HEADS UP! AND COLLABORATIVE SENTENCE WRITING

Rebecca Kastendick
Johnson County Community College

Abstract
The author describes two instructional strategies that strengthen students' understanding of key vocabulary.

Keywords: vocabulary instruction, vocabulary games

I'm always on the lookout for new activities to encourage students to learn and use new vocabulary that we study in class. With all the temptations of generative artificial intelligence, I've also needed to figure out ways to motivate students to write their own sentences with their own ideas. A couple of vocabulary activities I have used in my class recently are a version of Heads Up! and Collaborative Sentence Writing.

I first played Heads Up!, a game of giving clues and guessing words or phrases, with my game-loving family. We used the app version on a cellphone where the guessers held the phone facing outward on their foreheads. The answer that the guesser needed to come up with showed on the screen. We had laughing fits as we all shouted clues to the guesser.

In need of a different vocabulary review activity, I decided to adapt this game to my classroom. This activity works with partners or small groups. I make cards with vocabulary words and stack the cards into a pile, with the words face down. To play, one person draws a card (no peeking!) and puts the card up to their forehead, with the word facing out. Their partner or group members give clues. If the guesser can't get the word, they can pass and choose a new word.

Students are engaged and come up with all kinds of clues to get the guessers to know the words: synonyms, examples, and even (gasp!) grammatical information (e.g., "noun" or "it's an action").

A Spanish professor I shared this idea with adapted the activity as a competition. She gave a specific amount of time for each round, and teams competed to see how many vocabulary words they could guess correctly in each round. The teams played several rounds, earning points for each correct word. The team with the most points at the end of the rounds won.

A less lively but still engaging activity that promotes using vocabulary words in context is to have partners or small groups write collaborative sentences. Collaborative Sentence Writing forces (ha!) students to create original sentences as they discuss meanings and ideas with others. Students learn from each other through their discussions. I enjoy eavesdropping on students as they discuss their ideas and negotiate how to use the words.

Again, students can work in pairs or small groups. I assign the words for each pair or group. They write their sentences on papers to show on a doc cam or on the white board at the front of class. As a whole class, we can discuss and review the sentences.

For a more advanced activity, I give 5-10 vocabulary words, and students must write a paragraph that incorporates all the words. Students come up with themes for the paragraphs that are

often very different contexts from the original readings where the vocabulary words are from. I've used this activity as an assessment tool as well as a vocabulary review.

Author Biography

Rebecca Kastendick is an Adjunct Professor in the English for Academic Purposes program at Johnson County Community College, which means that she teaches English reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to non-native speakers of English. She earned her M.A. in English with a specialization in Teaching English as a Second Language from Iowa State University many years ago. In addition to teaching, Rebecca loves to travel, experience different cultures, and meet new friends. So far, she has visited 19 countries. Twice, she has taught English in China. In 2024, she plans to visit the Netherlands, Switzerland, and South Korea. She can be reached at rkastend@jccc.edu.

DIRECTED READING THINKING ACTIVITY[1]: A GRADUAL RELEASE METHOD TO DEMYSTIFY READING

LuAnn Fox
Olathe Public Schools

Abstract
The author describes an instructional strategy that deepens students' understanding of and engagement with texts.

Keywords: directed reading thinking activity, reading comprehension scaffold

Whenever students begin to read something of any bulk for class, we work on pre-reading strategies this way: aloud, we wonder at the title, enumerating what the title evokes for us; we consider any artwork provided; and then we consider the publication date. Since no one writes in a vacuum, we remind ourselves of the zeitgeist of the moments our author was constructing the text. After that, I read aloud to the class, freely stopping myself to ask and answer questions. I wonder aloud as it were. I model my wonderings as not completely understanding all the information at a first go. I model that my wonderings and questions are important, and they will be answered in due time.

Students, even secondary ones, like to be read to. But they also get to see the teacher's own call and response method, which is there to manifest the teacher's thinking as said teacher, me, reads. It reinforces that these wonderings are what good readers enact for themselves in their heads when they are reading for an academic purpose.

After some time—a paragraph or a few, depending on the complexity of the text—I tell the class I will still read, but as I stop in sentences or phrases, I want to hear their own wonderings chorally. I ask specific questions first, e.g. "why does Fitzgerald's narrator express the paradoxical sentiment that he and his father have always been communicative in a reserved way?" I want to hear *what* they are specifically thinking, *that* they are specifically thinking. So, I ask specific questions. Then, when the class is feeling comfortable, I continue reading, this time asking vague questions, e.g. "what's going on here?", hoping still for specific answers. It happens. I get specific answers.

This "we do" part following the "I do" is to set them up for success. They know that as a car burns more fuel backing out of the garage than from going to 30 to 40 mph, readers burn more cognitive energy going from inertia to exposition than already being in the thick of text.

Then it is time for students to take over the reading. I set them in partners and have them whisper read the next paragraphs with each other, and I roam the room listening to students demystifying the texts together. This part may take about five or ten minutes. I'm listening to hear that students are asking and answering questions and wonderings about the text with each other.

[1] For more information about the directed reading thinking activity, visit https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/directed-reading-thinking-activity-drta

At last, I feel confident that these students can be fully released to read the text on their own, with ways to keep them engaged with the text.

Author Biography

LuAnn Fox has been a high school ELA teacher for over 25 years. Now she is an MTSS literacy support specialist in Olathe Public Schools, A KSDE Teacher Leader Consultant, Greater Kansas City Writing Project consultant, College Board ELA consultant (pre-AP), and a KATE board member. She can be reached at llfox@olatheschools.org.

UNVEILING COURAGE: A REVIEW OF TRUDY LUDWIG'S *BRAVE EVERY DAY*

Michelle Anderson, Baylee Reyes, Mattelyn Swartz
Wichita State University

Abstract
The authors review the children's book *Brave Every Day* (2022) by Trudy Ludwig and illustrated by Patrice Barton, providing a brief summary, background information on Ludwig, and potential audiences and instructional strategies.

Keywords: children's book, Tracy Ludwig, Patrice Barton, *Brave Every Day*, social-emotional learning, anxiety, courage

Brave Every Day (2022), written by Trudy Ludwig and illustrated by Patrice Barton, showcases one of Ludwig's many successful picture books. *Brave Every Day* is a relatable fiction that depicts the life of Camila, a shy elementary school student battling social interactions and self-expression. The book takes place within an elementary school, skillfully addressing major issues such as bullying, peer pressure, and anxiety with sensitivity and empathy. Themes of empathy and courage are included in the storyline, offering elementary readers an interesting and reflective journey. Each day, Camila confronts difficult tasks like voicing her thoughts in class and creating new friendships. She is faced with the "what-ifs." Then Camila meets a friend, Kai. Throughout the book, they conquer these challenges together. Like most children, Camila has her share of hobbies, one being playing hide-and-seek, however, she uses it to cope with her concerns. A class trip to the aquarium causes Camila's worries to pile up even more. However, when an anxious classmate asks for help, Camila discovers that she can fight her fear together with Kai. Throughout the layered stories to be kind to one another, Camila's journey of overcoming her fears could inspire students to face their challenges with courage and resilience.

Brave Every Day will appeal to upper elementary readers and their teachers because it addresses difficult topics that are understandable and relevant to young children. This book can be used for author study in the classroom. Trudy Ludwig is a renowned author known for her impactful work in children's literature, particularly focusing on themes of empathy, kindness, and social-emotional learning. Born and raised in the United States, Ludwig's passion for writing stemmed from her own childhood experiences of feeling misunderstood. Ludwig's decision to start writing was fueled by her desire to make a positive difference in the lives of children, empowering them with the tools to navigate complex social dynamics and build healthier relationships. She is also an active member of the International Bullying Prevention Association—collaborating with organizations like Sesame Workshop and Passport to Peace Foundation to name a few. Ludwig uses simple, clear language and vivid illustrations to display complex emotions and situations throughout each of her stories, making this story an exceptional tool for teaching emotional intelligence.

Teachers can use *Brave Every Day* to teach students the importance of positive relationships and a supportive classroom environment, aligning with the idea of character education and inclusivity. However, educators may encounter challenges in discussing sensitive topics like bullying and anxiety. Establishing a safe and nurturing space for discussing such issues is important, ensuring students feel empowered to share their experiences and perspectives. Possible challenges in teaching through this book might alert various fears and anxieties similar to what Camila also experienced. Some students may find these topics sensitive or unsettling; discussion should come from a place of care, ensuring a safe, and supportive environment for all students.

Despite this challenge, we believe that using *Brave Every Day* is great for integrating reading aloud and social-emotional learning in elementary classrooms. Teachers can use this book for read-aloud sessions to discuss characters' feelings, actions, and decisions; and teachers can pause reading and ask questions about students' emotions throughout read aloud. Another way this book could be used in the classroom is for writing activities that give students the opportunity to reflect on the book's themes and their own experiences. The realistic portrayal of a child's fears that are hidden in plain sight lead to the empowering message of courage, which can be relatable in the classroom. This book does a great job showing that bravery is not about being fearless, but about facing our fears and overcoming them. We think this book is perfect in the classroom as it could potentially decrease bullying or any form of conflict in the classroom that may serve as a distraction from learning. Equally important is providing appropriate resources and support to students battling similar challenges, fostering an environment conducive to effective instruction and emotional well-being.

Author Biographies

Michelle Anderson is an aspiring teacher studying elementary education at Wichita State University. She is placed in a kindergarten classroom for her student teaching semester. Additionally, she works as a substitute teacher in USD 259, as well as a preschool teacher at a local preschool. She can be reached at manderson2@shockers.wichita.edu.

Baylee Reyes is a stiving teacher studying elementary education at Wichita State University. She is placed in a first-grade classroom for the remainder of her college career. Outside of her studies, she works as a patient care technician at the Little Clinic, working diligently in this role to assist in maintaining a healthy lifestyle for individuals and families. Through this line of work, witnessing the good and bad of youth has provided her with appropriate responses and approaches towards pedagogical care as an educator. She can be reached at bmwright3@shockers.wichita.edu.

Mattelyn Swartz is studying Elementary Education while competing for the Wichita State University Track and Field team. Her love for education stems from the power of knowledge and the ability to help gift her future students with that power. Mattelyn looks forward to teaching and coaching children in a rural town within the next few years. Outside of her athletics and studies, she teaches swim lessons, babysits, and works in her church's nursery. Mattelyn can be reached at mmswartz1@shockers.wichita.edu.

A ROAD TRIP OF ACCEPTANCE AND LOVE: A REVIEW OF AMBER MCBRIDE'S *ME (MOTH)*

Madilyn Kramer
Pittsburg State University

Abstract
The author reviews Amber McBride's 2021 young adult novel *Me (Moth)*, providing a brief summary, potential classroom audiences and instructional strategies, and similarly-themed texts.

Keywords: young adult novel-in-verse, Amber McBride, *Me (Moth)*, self-discovery, grief, mental health

A novel depicting a road trip of acceptance, grief, love and transcendence, 2021 National Book Award finalist *Me (Moth)* by Amber McBride tells the story of two high-school-aged teens, Moth and Sani, as they trace their respective cultures and histories across America.

Reader alert: my copy of the book's pages wore a rainbow of highlighters' colors, as I wanted to mark as much of the beautiful language as possible. McBride's metaphors had me feeling the emotional impact throughout the entire book. This book reached the perfect pitch of high emotion, with waves of sadness and fondness not only from the perspective of the characters' personalities but also from their experiences as they drive cross-country on a quest to discover the truth about their roots.

Written in free verse, this tale of the road is told from the perspective of Moth, a young African-American teenager who recently lost her family in a car accident. Once a Juilliard-quality dancer filled with love for life, Moth now struggles to accept her existence. Then, she meets another young teen, Sani, a Juilliard-quality singer who struggles to express his love for life, who comes from a rough home life and who faces an even rougher life as dictated by his stepfather. Looking for both a way out and the truth, Moth and Sani run away, driving to Sani's Navajo homeland in New Mexico.

Along the way, Moth and Sani visit historic sites of oppression of Native and African-American people, while sharing their own personal stories of spirituality. As the two travel, beginning to know each other on what is almost a supernatural connection, they fall in love. However, when they reach their final destination, the two face a truth that could cut the red string of love they had sewn together.

This book is appropriate for high school students because, like many students of similar ages, *Me (Moth)*'s protagonists focus on finding their identities and roots to discover more about themselves. Many readers of this age, like Moth, struggle to understand their current selves and, like Sani, what they will become in the future. This book also explores the inner world of mental health and grief in a real and beautiful way, with language that highlights the struggles of finding peace in one's mind.

Challenges that could happen while teaching this book are the discussions of mental health, the destructive behaviors stemming from those issues, and the spiritual beliefs of Moth and Sani. Young adult titles that can be offered as an alternative to this book include Angeline Boulley's *Firekeeper's Daughter* and Dan Gemeinhart's *The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise*.

Author Biography

Madilyn Kramer, who cannot wait to integrate fun books into classroom units, is a student at Pittsburg State University studying English Education. Madilyn grew up in rural Southeast Kansas and plans to stay and teach in the area. Madilyn can be reached at mekramer@gus.pittstate.edu.

MONUMENTAL STORIES FOUND IN *WE DESERVE MONUMENTS*

Haven Massey
Wichita State University

Abstract
The author reviews the young adult novel *We Deserve Monuments* (2022) by Jas Hammonds, providing a brief summary, historical and contemporary connections, and instructional strategies.

Keywords: young adult novel, Jas Hammonds, *We Deserve Monuments*, racial justice, sapphic romance, racial violence

Winner of the 2023 Corretta Scott King-John Steptoe Award for New Talent, *We Deserve Monuments* (2022) by Jas Hammonds follows Avery Anderson, a 17-year-old about to begin her senior year in high school. All her plans are abruptly stopped when she is uprooted from her life in Washington, D.C., and her family moves to Bardell, Georgia, to care for her terminally ill grandmother, Grandma Letty. Avery is thrust into a hostile environment as deep-rooted conflicts between her mother and Grandma Letty resurface causing tensions to rise. Avery finds herself stuck in the middle as she attempts to uncover the secret causes of their tumultuous relationship. Gradually, Avery breaks down the cold walls of her grandmother and begins to unravel her family history. She explores her roots and discovers how racial violence can ripple down through generations, all while finding love and acceptance she never felt she deserved. Avery finds solace in two girls, her neighbor Simone Cole, whom Avery develops an unexpected crush on, and Jade Oliver, a member of a high-status white family, whose mother's murder remains unsolved.

This novel would be something that captures the attention of a range of students across middle and high school. The familiar themes of high school romance, adjusting to a new environment, and tumultuous family relationships are relatable to most adolescents. Additionally, the elements of sapphic romance and multicultural representation allow a diverse set of readers to see themselves within the story. When including this novel within the curriculum, students can consider how racial violence affects future generations and consider the cost of sharing our stories and discovering difficult truths. It also provides an opportunity to consider the value of connecting to our roots and how this can help discover your identity and authentic voice.

A beneficial learning activity would be an inquiry on prominent American monuments. The novel features monuments of the fictional racist school founder Richard Beckwith. Avery considers who is deserving of being immortalized and why these individuals hardly ever look like her. Students can research prominent monuments in the United States, such as Mount Rushmore, Christ of the Ozarks, or the now dismantled Robert E. Lee monument in Richmond, Virginia. Students can then consider what notable multicultural figures they have seen represented in monuments—such as Martin Luther King, Jr., George Washington Carver, Harriet Tubman, and Gwendolyn Brooks—and consider how their representation compares to white figures.

Depending on the community in which this book is taught, there could be pushback due to the romantic relationship between Avery and Simone and the critique of many of the white

individuals in the town, including police officers and politicians. Starting the novel study with some background information on microaggressions and systemic racism could prime students for the upcoming subject matter. Should this novel be challenged, educators might consider another impactful text like the winner of the 2023 William C. Morris Young Adult Debut Award *The Life and Crimes of Hoodie Rosen*, which similarly delves into themes of identity exploration and navigating adversity within a new and hostile community.

By addressing potential pushback, educators can deepen students' understanding important topics in *We Deserve Monuments*. Recognizing the universality of its themes, such as identity and belonging, this novel serves as a catalyst for meaningful discussions across diverse readerships.

Author Biography

Haven Massey graduated from Wichita State University in May 2024 with a major in Secondary English Education and a minor in Theatre. She presented at the 2023 Kansas Association of Teachers of English (KATE) Conference and will begin her teaching career at Maize South High School in August. She can be reached at havengrace9@gmail.com.

A GLIMPSE OF MCCURDY: HER RISE & FALL FROM FAME IN *I'M GLAD MY MOM DIED*

Danika Pester
Wichita State University

Abstract
The author reviews Jennette McCurdy's 2022 memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, providing a brief summary, personal connections, and potential classroom audiences and applications.

Keywords: young adult memoir, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, Jennette McCurdy, child actor, *iCarly*, mental health, abuse

In Jennette McCurdy's 2022 memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, we catch a glimpse of the actor's not-so glamorous life. McCurdy enlightens her readers by opening up about many challenges and hardships she faced such as anorexia, bulimia, and alcoholism. Based on the book's title, most of the issues McCurdy goes through are because of her mom. For many of us, a mother is supposed to be our cheerleader, our best friend, the person who raises and takes care of us. Unfortunately, it was McCurdy doing just that for her mom instead. Jennette grew up in a poor family, with a father who was gone all the time and a mother who had health issues related to her cancer. McCurdy was the youngest of four children and ended up losing her childhood due to working as an actress at such a young age. She is best known for her role in Nickelodeon's *iCarly*, where she plays a character named Sam Puckett. Even her experience with Nickelodeon wasn't as "magical" as it may have seemed. Jennette's memoir opens her private life to the public and gives a glimpse of how her life isn't at all what we thought it was.

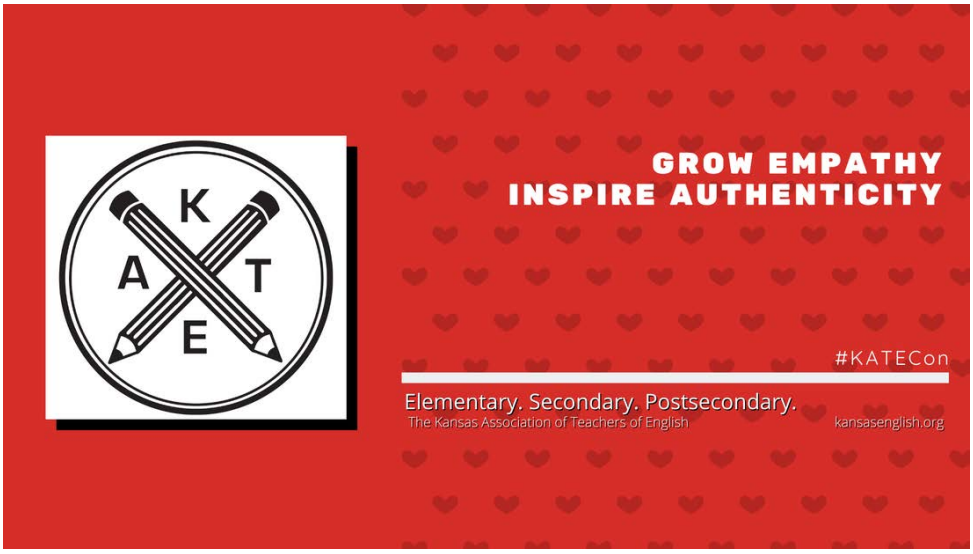
I think this book will appeal to high school readers because most people are aware of who Jennette McCurdy is and the popular show that she played a role in. Often, we read news and magazine articles on popular or famous people, so reading a book about someone who is still relevant and popular, would most likely appeal to a class of high schoolers. Depending on the maturity of the students, we could read the memoir together and outside of class and have whole-group discussions. I think there is a lot to dissect in the text, and plenty of opportunities to relate to the author, as well as real-world situations. We may know someone who is a people-pleaser, or someone who struggles with staying sober, maybe even someone who came from an abusive family. The classroom is meant to be a safe place, and I trust that students can feel empathic toward their peers and that anything discussed within the classroom will stay in the classroom.

It's hard to narrow down what I like most about the book. Once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. I read almost the whole book in just one sitting. I felt like I could relate to Jennette in multiple ways, and other times I felt like I wasn't alone. Jennette's writing made it sound like she was just casually talking to me directly about her problems. I think it's interesting that we often think famous people have the most amazing lives, but we never truly know what they are going through. So, I think what I like most about the book is how vulnerable McCurdy is when

writing about her life. I like to know that people like Jennette McCurdy are just like us: emotional, vulnerable, and human.

Author Biography

Danika Pester completed her bachelor's degree in Secondary Education at Wichita State University in May 2024, and she will begin her first year of teaching in August. She plans to pursue a master's degree in English in the future. During her free time, she enjoys reading, journaling, and spending time with her family. Email Danika at dbpester@shockers.wichita.edu.



BACK ON TRACK: ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC ADVENTURES IN *GROWING SEASON* BY JAMES V. JACOBS

John Franklin
Pittsburg State University

Abstract
The author reviews the young adult novel *Growing Season* (2023) by James V. Jacobs, providing a brief summary, teaching ideas, and a list of similarly-themed texts.

Keywords: young adult novel, *Growing Season*, James V. Jacobs, sports, distance running, college, mental health

In this welcome sequel to *No Ordinary Season* distance runner and protagonist Cassie Garnet endures two tyrannical coaches: one her final semester of high school, and one her first semester of college.

As she transitions from her senior year to her freshman year, she is beset by bewildering, frustrating, rewarding situations: deciding whether to have sex with her boyfriend Jake (she abstains); attending a different college from him; leaving high school teammates behind; making friends with college teammates; searching for an adult as sympathetic as her beloved Coach Simon.

In this 2023 publication, Jacobs realistically depicts the regimen of a college student athlete balancing academic and athletic demands as Cassie teeters on the verge of a nervous breakdown, all the while suffering severe homesickness and the threat of losing her scholarship.

Luckily, a diverse group of supportive teammates including her Jewish roommate, athletes from Kenya and Mexico, and a jaded senior help her get counseling, where she finds the supportive adult she so desperately needs. Mr. Teverbaugh and teammates help her confront the coach they call T-Rex as well as a sexual predator from her past. And, as she matures academically as well as personally, Cassie learns to meet the expectations of her college professors.

I could easily see this book being read in a high school class the focus of which is looking ahead to college. While Cassie is an athlete, many of her predicaments apply to many first-year female college students.

For those looking to emphasize the importance of sports in adolescent lives, the novels of Kwame Alexander and Chris Crutcher belong alongside Jacobs. For those who want to read more about women in sports, make room for two nonfiction goodies: Abby Wambach's *Wolfpack: How Young People Will find their Voice, Unite the Pack, and Change the World*; and Andrew Maraniss's *Inaugural Ballers: The True Story of the First Women's Olympic Basketball Team*.

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 may be reached at jfranklin@pittstate.edu.