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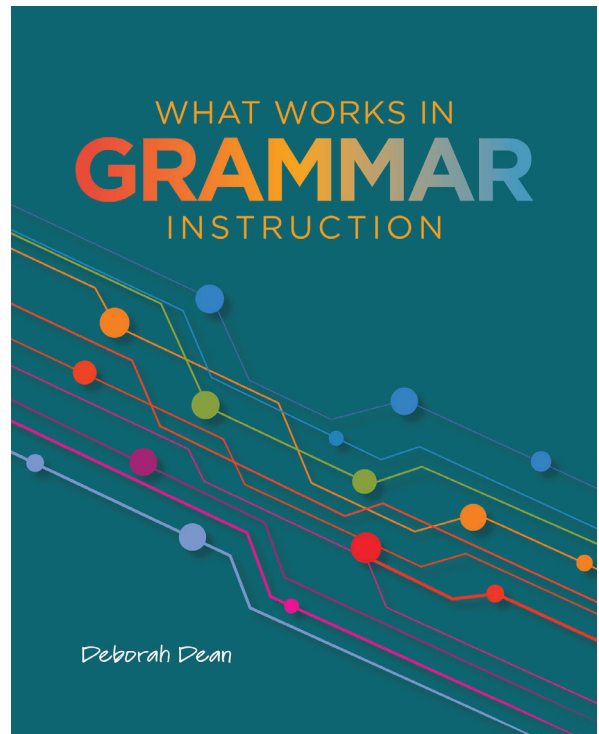
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As a former junior high and high school English teacher, **Deborah Dean** encouraged students' curiosity about language. She now does the same with preservice teachers at Brigham Young University, helping them develop interest in and curiosity about language and how it works.

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ABOUT ENGLISH JOURNAL

English Journal is the award-winning NCTE journal of ideas for English language arts teachers in junior and senior high schools and middle schools. It presents the teaching of writing and reading, literature, and language arts, and includes information on how teachers are applying practices, research, and multimodal literacies in their classrooms.

English Journal is a practitioner-based publication in the discipline of English language arts. (*EJ* is published as an annual volume with issues appearing in September, November, January, March, May, and July.)

English Journal is refereed, and virtually all manuscripts are read by three outside reviewers who are teachers and teacher educators. We try to reach a decision on each article within five months. The decision on manuscripts submitted in response to a specific call for manuscripts will be made after the call deadline.

Prospective contributors should obtain a copy of the Statement on Gender and Language from the NCTE website at www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations and Works Cited page), with standard margins. Please save copies of anything you send us. We cannot return any materials.
- In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than 15 double-spaced, typed pages in length (2,500 to 4,000 words including citations). Number all pages of the manuscript.
- Use in-text documentation by following the current edition of the MLA Handbook. Where applicable, a list of Works Cited and any other bibliographic information should also follow MLA style.
- Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the NCTE Statement on Gender and Language (see address above).

Submit all manuscripts through the *English Journal* Editorial Manager site at www.editorialmanager.com/ncteej. Questions can be sent to englishjournal@ncte.org.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Readers of *English Journal* are welcome to submit a letter to the editors. Letters should be **150 to 175 words**, refer to an article that has appeared in a recent volume, and include the writer's contact information.

Writers of letters selected for publication will be notified prior to appearing in *English Journal*. Letters may be edited and shortened by the editors for space.

Submit letters to englishjournal@ncte.org.

TEACHING WITH HOPE, TEACHING FOR JUSTICE (Volume 113, Issue 1)

Submission Deadline: February 1, 2023

Publication Date: September 2023

New editors: Amy Burke, Aimee Hendrix-Soto, and Mary Amanda (Mandy) Stewart

For our first issue of *EJ*, we invite manuscripts that speak to the existing wisdom of practicing English language arts teachers and their students, literacy teacher educators, and literacy researchers. Over the last two years, we have collectively experienced a global pandemic, civil unrest and disobedience in response to police and state-sanctioned violence, and laws restricting and censoring content and texts. As always, some communities have experienced significantly greater hardship and have been disproportionately affected by these events.

In that spirit, we encourage submissions that may disrupt what are considered best practices or that question long-held assumptions about learners and literacy teaching. How have you adjusted your teaching in response to the new normals (e.g., the pandemic, civil unrest, restrictive legislation and censorship)? Where have you found pockets of light that have allowed you to sustain yourself, your students, and your communities? In places where justice work seems impossible but is most crucially needed, what work are you doing?

Please email us at EnglishJournalEditors2023@gmail.com with any questions.

PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBILITIES (Volume 113, Issue 2)

Submission Deadline: March 15, 2023

Publication Date: November 2023

For our unthemed issues, you may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles center classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers engaged in meaningful teaching and learning. Manuscripts that foreground critical approaches to secondary English language arts and move the field toward justice for marginalized youth will be prioritized. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

BOOK BANNING AND CENSORSHIP: RESISTANCE IN THE ELA CLASSROOM (Volume 113, Issue 3)

Submission Deadline: April 1, 2023

Publication Date: January 2024

New editors: Amy Burke, Aimee Hendrix-Soto, and Mary Amanda (Mandy) Stewart

Literacy and teaching have always been political acts (Freire 43; Willis and Harris 72). In a time when our democratic norms have been challenged perhaps more strongly than ever before, classrooms must remain spaces to engage with ideas without fear of recrimination. However, since 2021, both state legislatures and local school boards across the United States have

sought to more greatly control educational discourse through book bans (see PEN America's Index of School Book Bans) and the regulation of what topics can and cannot be discussed in classrooms (Friedman and Johnson). As of August 2022, at least six states have either proposed or passed legislation calling for the removal of books from school libraries and/or classrooms (Jensen). In Virginia, some lawmakers proposed outlawing the sale of certain books at privately owned businesses, such as Barnes & Noble (Natanson). At the same time, politically motivated groups have strategically taken over school boards in some places, with the newly configured boards enacting policies at the local level that even more greatly restrict book access and topics of classroom discussion (Goodman). In many instances, books and topics that are banned involve already marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+ and/or BIPOC persons, and often include material of a sexual nature (Robinson; Friedman and Johnson).

In addition to the consequences for educators outlined directly in these laws and/or policies (e.g., loss of job, suspension or loss of teaching licensure, loss of district accreditation), there are also additional material, panopticon-like (Bentham and Bosovic 43; Foucault 195) consequences, which in many cases seem to be the unspoken intent of the policies in the first place: when the fear is great enough, people surveil themselves. Examples of this include school districts preemptively removing all books from classroom libraries, even those not on “the list,” and the preemptive discontinuation of book clubs although they are still legally allowed (Richardson Independent School District). In another instance, a city government forced its public library to remove a *Twitter* post which, during the American Library Association's Banned Books Week, simply listed the ten most widely banned books, and then apologized on behalf of the library for appearing to court controversy (Zheng).

While these actions certainly are not without precedent (e.g., the McCarthy Red Scare; 1980s Satanic panic), history also shows us the importance of active resistance in the face of government censorship. Resistance can take many forms and occur in different contexts. We often conceptualize resistance as occurring in public spaces; for example, one may speak out against a proposed policy at a school board meeting or participate in a march on public streets. However, many forms of resistance occur within more private spaces. Drawing on Collins's Black feminist epistemological frame, these acts are “everyday acts of resistance” (37). These “everyday acts” might include teachers who have been barred from using certain books in their classroom, but still work to actively build and maintain a classroom community of respect, kindness, and empathy, especially for those different from themselves. Or perhaps a teacher uses their district's required materials, but in such a way that difficult and/or topical issues are still addressed through those texts. Youth themselves also enact everyday ways of resistance, such as through not engaging in work in which they are not represented or that is not meaningful to their lives.

For this themed issue, we are interested in (1) the stories of how laws and policies (or the threat thereof) have caused material consequences for your teaching, research, or work more broadly; (2) forms of resistance you and/or your students may have engaged in or experienced in order to counter attempts to control access to books, discourse, and ideas; and (3) practice-based research you have conducted that directly addresses or relates to these issues.

PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBILITIES

(Volume 113, Issue 4)

Submission Deadline: June 1, 2023

Publication Date: March 2024

For our unthemed issues, you may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles center classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers engaged in meaningful teaching and learning. Manuscripts that foreground critical approaches to secondary English language arts and move the field toward justice for marginalized youth will be prioritized. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

WHAT IS ENGLISH?

(Volume 113, Issue 5)

Submission Deadline: August 1, 2023

Publication Date: May 2024

For this issue, we ask teachers, researchers, and leaders in English and English language arts to consider the field today. What is it? What are its aims? What *should* it be? What *should* its aims be?

This call is an opportunity to revisit a question asked by writing scholar Peter Elbow almost 35 years ago. In 1987, selected representatives of several professional organizations—including, among others, NCTE, the Modern Language Association (MLA), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and the Conference on English Education (CEE; now known as English Language Arts Teacher Educators, or ELATE)—convened the second English Coalition Conference. (The first conference was held in the 1960s.) Sixty people, organized across three levels (elementary, secondary, and university), met across three weeks with this stated goal:

to reach across levels of schooling in a constructive way; to see if consensus about the teaching of English could be achieved; and to identify solutions to the problems that teachers of English have been encountering as a result of changes in the student population, in institutional and community circumstances, and in the field itself. (Franklin 2, qtd. in Elbow 5)

Many participants felt English teachers across K–12 and university settings taught English studies as a “tripod, one of whose legs was language, another writing, and the third literature” (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xx). This, they argued, made the field one in which the subject matter was front and center—not students and teachers—and in which students were positioned as passive receivers of knowledge. Participants argued that addressing the conditions of their time called for “a fresh view of the field” (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xx). Thus, conference participants discussed what students should develop as a result of their formal schooling in English—in terms of language, writing, literature, cultural literacy, and the impact of television and other media (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford xix).

Yet while there was much debate about foundational issues and concerns in the teaching of English, the 1987 conference participants concurred that there were aspects of English that are central to democracy, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening to increase appreciation of diversity and of divergent viewpoints. Based on the conversations across the three weeks, writing scholar Peter Elbow suggested that while *English* was difficult

(impossible?) to define, “perhaps English can end up being a discipline that is, above all, about making knowledge rather than about studying already existing knowledge” (Elbow 118).

Now, 35 years since this group of teachers and scholars convened, the world is in many ways radically different. We have been shaped by periods of economic growth and recession, increased domestic terrorism, climate change, and war. Simultaneously, we have experienced the explosion of the internet, which has changed how we interact with texts and one another, easing access to information and making dis- and misinformation more rampant. Demographic shifts in the United States mean that while White children still make up the majority of students, they will not do so in the coming years. More than ever, our classrooms represent a rich array of cultures and sophisticated language variations of English. And although the United States and other English-speaking nations have a rich, even if overlooked, history of multilingualism, this has increased due to global migration trends as well as transnational ways of living influenced by technology and media. In short, there have been even more “changes in the student population, in institutional and community circumstances, and in the field itself,” which simultaneously means some things haven’t changed at all.

As we take stock of the field today, what are the challenges? Where has English become more open, more responsive, more critical, more participatory? What still needs to change in order to achieve equity and justice? For this call, we ask you to provide readers with a fresh, new view of the field as you consider the question Peter Elbow chose as the title of his book reflecting on the 1987 English Coalition Conference: *What is English?*

PERSPECTIVES AND POSSIBILITIES

(Volume 113, Issue 6)

Submission Deadline: November 1, 2023

Publication Date: July 2024

For our unthemed issues, you may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles center classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers engaged in meaningful teaching and learning. Manuscripts that foreground critical approaches to secondary English language arts and move the field toward justice for marginalized youth will be prioritized. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

SPEAKING MY MIND

We invite you to speak out on an issue that concerns you about English language arts teaching and learning. If your essay is published, it will appear in a future issue of *English Journal*. We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words, as well as inquiries regarding possible subjects. Indicate that you are submitting an essay for the Speaking My Mind feature when you upload the document to the Editorial Manager.

POETRY

Editor: Alexa Garvoille

North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics,
Morganton

In the pages of *English Journal*, we look to publish well-crafted poems that connect our readers to topics central to English education: the impact of reading and writing on young people, words

and language, classroom stories, and reflections on teaching and learning. Poetry reminds us, as educators, how to live in this world.

Submit your work by emailing an attachment to englishjournalpoetry@gmail.com. Use the subject line “Poetry Submission for Review.” The first page of the attached document should be a cover sheet that includes your name, address, email, and a two-sentence biographical sketch. In your bio, include how long you have been a member of NCTE, if applicable, and a publishable contact email. Following the cover sheet, include one to five original poems in the same document. Though we welcome work of any length, shorter pieces (thirty lines and under) often work best for the journal. Poems must be original and not previously published. Simultaneous submissions are welcome, though writers must immediately withdraw from consideration any poems that are to be published elsewhere by contacting the editors via email.

Poets whose work is published will receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which their work appears. Additional inquiries about poetry submissions may be directed to the coeditors at englishjournalpoetry@gmail.com. We look forward to reading and celebrating your work.

ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Teacher photographs of classroom scenes and individual students are welcome. Photographs may be uploaded to Editorial Manager at the address above in any standard image format at 300 dpi. Photos should be accompanied by complete identification: teacher/photographer’s name, location of scene, and date photograph was taken. If faces are clearly visible, names of those photographed should be included, along with their statement of permission for the photograph to be reproduced in *EJ*.

ORIGINAL CARTOONS

Cartoons should depict scenes or ideas potentially amusing to English language arts teachers. They can be submitted to Editorial Manager at the address above; we can accept any standard graphics format at 300 dpi.

COLUMNS

Black Youth Futures

(beginning Sept. 2023: Sept./Jan./May)

Column Editor: Stephanie Toliver

University of Colorado Boulder

Over the past few decades, calls have abounded to prominently foreground the language and literacy practices of Black youth. Scholars have called for more attention to the historical literacies of Black people in hopes that educators see the inherent genius within Black youth (Muhammad 13). They have asked for teachers to consider the ways in which Black youth engage in play with text, genre, language, and each other (Baker-Bell 8; Gaunt 3; Bryan 74). They have demanded that educators uplift Black young people as they challenge the anti-Blackness embedded within school systems (Coles 36; Love 12), and they have implored educational stakeholders to make space for Black youth to imagine worlds in which they are free to experience the full range of humanity: love, anger, joy, excitement, sadness, pride, hope, and all the emotions in between (Toliver 85; Turner 128).

It is within these calls that this column exists. Specifically, this column is dedicated to the teachers, teacher educators, community members, and young people who are committed to the liberatory futures of Black youth. It is for all who imagine and create alongside young Black folk to ensure that the next

generation of Black youth can thrive. With this in mind, this column welcomes commentary that attends to the expansive language and literacy lives of Black young people. Toward this goal, authors might consider questions such as the following: What texts (written by and about Black people) have you found particularly useful in the classroom? How have you made space for Black joy, Black dreams, Black genius, and Black pride in your classroom, research, and/or community work? What assignments have you created that enable Black youth to voice their concerns about the world? What does the future of education, schools, or schooling look like for Black youth?

Rather than just accepting traditional practitioner articles (i.e., research essay, nonfiction, or narrative nonfiction), this column aims to be as expansive as Black youth's literacies. Thus, poems, narratives, comics, paintings, and the like are also welcome. Please send submissions of 1,200–1,400 words as a Word document to Stephanie Toliver at stephanie.toliver@colorado.edu. Inquiries about potential submissions are also welcomed.

Critical Approaches to Literature Study

(beginning Sept. 2023: Nov./Mar./July)

Column Editor: Jeanne Dyches

Iowa State University

In this column, authors present pedagogical possibilities for teaching literature in critical ways. While critical approaches to literature study take up, examine, confront, and address systems of power, they can also illuminate joy, creativity, community, and agency as forms of resistance.

This column offers possibilities for engaging with literature as a vehicle for opening up justice-oriented conversation and just futures. Importantly, columns target the *how* of literature study—that is, ways in which teachers, students, and stakeholders of ELA exercise agency—rather than the *what*. Column authors may illuminate literature study approaches utilizing a variety of genres. We welcome columns that examine ways to teach subversively with canonical texts, foster critical literacies using young adult literature, pair literary nonfiction with current events, or decenter the role of specific texts entirely. Columns should be 1,200–1,400 words in length; email questions and submissions (as a Word document) to Jeanne Dyches (jdyches@iastate.edu).

Reimagining Research

(beginning Sept. 2023: Nov./Mar./July)

Column Editor: Tiffany DeJaynes

Lehman College, City University of New York

This column aims to highlight thoughtful conversations about youth as knowledge generators, rethink the dominance of the traditional research paper in English language arts classrooms, and consider the ways in which young people's original research can inform public policies and activism. As such, the column publishes accounts of youth conducting research in innovative ways in schools and communities; research innovations might include collaborative, multimodal, digital, action-oriented, community-focused, or arts-based practices.

Educators employing research practices that creatively engage young people in critical participatory action research, archival research, working with unconventional sources, or creatively sharing and disseminating research and more are invited to share their curricular approaches and lessons learned. Please contact Tiffany DeJaynes to discuss ideas for the column or send manuscripts of 1,200–1,400 words as Word documents to tiffany.dejaynes@lehman.cuny.edu for consideration.

Teaching and Composing Today

(beginning Sept. 2023: Sept./Jan./May)

Column Editor: Deb Kelt

The University of Texas at Austin

As many teachers will attest, it is often thrilling to sit knee-to-knee with a youth writer. When they share writing—often filled with details about their families, cultures, languages, identities, frustrations, hopes, and more—we are awestruck. Katherine Bomer has taught us that writing teachers get to spend entire days surrounded by “the quirky brilliance and humor, the heart-breaking honesty, and surreal beauty” of student writing (Bomer 125). A writing classroom can often feel like an intricate tapestry of human experience, woven together with the words and work of teachers and students.

This column is seeking submissions that feature youth's writing alongside stories of the teaching that supported them. Writing teachers, from in- or out-of-school contexts, are encouraged to share stories that illustrate the teaching of writing in our world right now. We are interested in seeing all kinds of work—from both novice writers and experienced writers alike, writers working in many languages, writers composing in various genres, as well as work that is in process or finished. The complexity of teaching writing has only grown over the last few years: the COVID-19 pandemic, political upheaval, ongoing racial violence, and censorship have challenged youth writers and their teachers. What have you learned while teaching writing during these times? What student work illuminates the journey you took together? We want to hear about inquiries you undertook with students as they composed, highlighting your work as a writing teacher along with the pieces students produced during these explorations. Tell us the story of your student(s) and your work together, sharing both the brilliant teaching moves you made and the struggles you encountered.

We invite you to share your teaching insights with writing, and we cannot wait to see the student work that resulted—work you had the honor and privilege of seeing first, sitting knee-to-knee with writers in your precious classroom. Please send submissions of 1,200–1,400 words as a Word document to dkelt@utexas.edu.

Teaching Multilingual Learners in ELA Classrooms

(beginning Sept. 2023: Sept./Jan./May)

Column Editor: Melody Zoch

University of North Carolina–Greensboro

Multilingual learners (MLs) are the fastest-growing group of students entering US public schools. In the next few years, an estimated one out of every four school-aged children will speak a language other than English at home. ELA teachers must be deft at addressing the needs of MLs, which can include drawing on their funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 71), embracing their identities as MLs, and understanding the challenges language-minoritized learners and their families may experience. Too often, middle- and high school spaces privilege monolingual instructional models where English language and literacy proficiency are considered the norm. This is counter to the needs of MLs, whose linguistic repertoires should be honored rather than repressed or punished.

This column seeks to amplify the voices of ELA teachers who are committed to the growth and well-being of MLs. The column editor invites submissions that feature research, examples of practices, and reflections on practice that support MLs in the ELA classroom. All submissions should engage asset-based approaches to discussing and supporting MLs in equitable ways. Areas of

interest include, but are not limited to, the incorporation of translanguaging practices (García et al. 256), how identity work and affirmation are explored in the ELA classroom, and using culturally sustaining practices (Paris and Alim 85). Questions authors might explore include: In what ways does language intersect with other identities? In what ways do you incorporate families and the community in your teaching of MLs? In what ways do you engage MLs in exploring activism and social justice issues in the ELA classroom? What are some critical incidents (Tripp 8) that have shaped your teaching of MLs? What specific strategies and texts have supported your MLs?

Please send inquiries and submissions of 1,200–1,400 words as a Word document to mzoch@uncg.edu.

LGBTQIA+ Intersectional Identities

(beginning Sept. 2023: Nov./Mar./July)

Column Editor: Stephanie Anne Shelton

University of Alabama

The acronym LGBTQIA+ incorporates ranges of identities and expressions related to genders and sexualities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, and asexual individuals. LGBTQIA+ youth are present in classrooms world-wide and are among the most vulnerable; however, substantial research demonstrates that supportive teachers make incredible differences in LGBTQIA+ students' lives and school experiences.

LGBTQIA+ students' needs are shaped by more than gender identity, gender expression, or sexuality. Students navigate assigned, assumed, and self-asserted social example, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, ablebodiedness, and language usage. They also live and learn in specific geographic and cultural contexts. Their LGBTQIA+ identities constantly intersect with these many factors; efforts to provide equitable, respectful, and effective learning spaces necessitate intersectional understandings of LGBTQIA+ issues in schools.

This column seeks to share English educators' stories on how they learn about, recognize, and affirm intersectional LGBTQIA+ identities. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to, instructional strategies that explore LGBTQIA+ issues as intersecting with other identities or contexts; case studies of efforts to engage students or colleagues in intersectional considerations of LGBTQIA+ issues; and reflective narratives that explore how awareness of intersectional LGBTQIA+ identities has shaped teachers' professional identities.

Inquiries, submissions, or suggestions for future columns should be directed to Stephanie Anne Shelton at sashelton@ua.edu. Submissions of 1,200–1,400 words should be sent as attachments.

Critical Curations: Developing Rich Text Sets for Middle-Grade and Secondary Classrooms

(beginning Sept. 2023: Sept./Jan./May)

Column Editors: Nicole Amato and Katie Priske

University of Iowa

Curate: Make meaning for oneself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance.

— AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

Critical curation invites both students and teachers to take critical stances and “explore multiple perspectives, challenge dominant ideologies, and include marginalized voices within and beyond the literary canon” (Lechtenberg 3). Alongside the

importance of curation is the importance of representation, which as Hamad asserts has “real world consequences” (27). Work around the importance of curation and representation has been ongoing in English language arts spaces. We align this column with the work of #DisruptTexts, asserting that curriculum choices are never neutral, and curriculum must center Black, Indigenous, and other voices of color (Ebarvia et al.).

We believe critical curation of texts in the ELA classroom is an exploratory practice that honors curiosity and inquiry. These curations aim to support teachers in critical literacy and critical inquiry work within and beyond the classroom. This column is guided by the following questions: (1) What themes and issues are urgent points of discussion in 7–12 literacy classrooms? (2) How can ELA teachers and librarians collaboratively curate multimodal and multigenre text sets for their students? We invite essays dedicated to exploring these questions while curating texts (broadly defined) around critical topics for discussion in ELA classrooms, such as but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability. We aim to curate and review 3–5 texts per column around a central topic.

Please contact Nicole Amato and Katie Priske to discuss ideas for the column or send your essays of 1,200–1,400 words as Word documents for consideration to criticalcurationscolumn@gmail.com.

The Future Is Now

(beginning Sept. 2023: Nov./Mar./July)

Column Editors: Melinda McBee Orzulak

Bradley University

Danielle Lillge

Illinois State University

In November 2023, the “Future Is Now” roundtable sessions at the NCTE Annual Convention will celebrate a decade of providing opportunities for beginning English teachers to present their scholarship. Building on the strength of these sessions, this column shines a light on the inquiries of beginning ELA teachers, who are navigating the early stages of their professional learning journeys as preservice or inservice teachers with one to four years of teaching experience.

Acknowledging that none of us—beginning and veteran teachers alike—have arrived, we invite submissions that foreground a genuine question which drives beginning teachers' inquiries through teaching, research, or creative activity. We encourage authors to illuminate the origins of their question in relation to their own experiences as well as in relation to other voices—whether students, colleagues, mentors, researchers, parents, authors, creators, or other stakeholders. And we urge authors to explore layered considerations that lead to possibilities for future learning, teaching, research, or creative activity. Instead of easy fixes, simple solutions, or truisms, let us highlight what we gain from assuming an inquiry stance in scholarly conversation with others as we look to the future by celebrating the nuance and complexity of ELA teaching.

We seek to support beginning teacher authors who, through their writing, will join and shape the conversations in our field of ELA. Toward that end, we invite single-author submissions as well as those coauthored with colleagues, mentors, or students. Please send submissions of 1,200–1,400 words as a Word document to the editors, Melinda McBee Orzulak and Danielle Lillge, at EJfutureisnow@gmail.com. Include in your email your full name(s), school affiliation(s), and the main email contact for the lead author, if the submission is coauthored. Inquiries about potential submissions are also welcomed.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: NCTE CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARDS

Nominations are requested from publishers and NCTE members for the following NCTE Children's Book Awards:

- The NCTE **Charlotte Huck Award® for Outstanding Fiction for Children** was established in 2014 to promote and recognize excellence in the writing of fiction for children. This award recognizes fiction that has the potential to transform children's lives by inviting compassion, imagination, and wonder. Submission information can be found on the NCTE webpage at <https://ncte.org/awards/ncte-childrens-book-awards/charlotte-huck-award/>.
- The NCTE **Orbis Pictus Award®** was established in 1989 to promote and recognize excellence in the writing of nonfiction for children. Orbis Pictus commemorates the work of Johannes Amos Comenius, *Orbis Pictus—The World in Pictures* (1658), considered to be the first book planned for children. Submission information can be found on the NCTE webpage at <https://ncte.org/awards/orbis-pictus-award-nonfiction-for-children/>.
- The NCTE **Notable Children's Poetry and Verse Novels** list has been presented annually since 2011 to celebrate excellence in children's poetry books. This list includes all forms of poetry, including individual poetry, anthologies, narratives, biographical poems, and verse novels. Submission information and criteria can be found on the NCTE webpage at <https://ncte.org/awards/excellence-in-poetry-for-children-living-american-poet/>.

Nominations are due by **October 15, 2023**.

ABOUT THE COVER



JUNTOS (2022) is a large wall mural by contemporary visual artist and designer Mitsu Overstreet, who is known for his public art installations. The mural is located on Geronimo Drive between Edgemere Boulevard and Montana Avenue in El Paso, Texas, a significant city for human and bird migrations in North America. Created with mineral paint on concrete, the mural is over 7,500 square feet and stretches approximately 1,200 feet long.

Overstreet is drawn to place-making and meaningful, site-specific art, which he sees as key to strengthening a cohesive identity in the community the art reflects. He sees public art as a source of energy where communities can learn, heal, and grow. The snowy egret, also known as *garcita blanca* or *garza nívea*, appears year-round in El Paso. Visit Overstreet's website at www.mitsuoverstreet.com.

FROM THE EDITORS

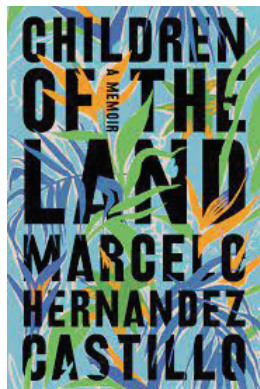
R. JOSEPH RODRÍGUEZ

St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas



It didn't matter how good I was at hiding, I knew they would always find me if they wanted. It was useless to blend in, to not bring attention to myself—speak neither too loud nor too soft. It didn't matter if I perfected my English—speak like a person who is wandering but not lost. It was useless to try to negotiate two worlds at once when only one of them was visible while the other one threatened to collapse. And yet I tried, but it came at a price.

—MARCELO HERNANDEZ CASTILLO,
CHILDREN OF THE LAND: A MEMOIR



The hemispheric Américas stretch from North America to South America and across countries, cultures, islands, languages, peoples, regions, and territories. Various transactional agreements and treaties exist in records that reveal the challenges and survival of diverse people across the Américas. Survival is strongly dependent on the varied forms of expression to carry the arts, cultures, languages, and human inventiveness—forward and onward.

In language arts, students examine many essays, historical accounts, lyrics, maps, narratives, novels, poems, songs, and stories that reveal what makes a people, neighborhood, state, country, hemisphere, and world. For this issue of *English Journal*, I invited teachers and teacher educators to share their language arts practices that engage students in analysis of the narratives of the hemispheric Américas and their varied political landscapes, human migrations, and social changes. Some questions to consider were: Which literary works do students experience today that present the stories of becoming human and whole as citizens, residents, and travelers in the Américas? Which narratives hold students' attention, engage them as thinkers and writers, and challenge their perspectives and views? As Castillo asks, how do our students explore their own migrations and movement in becoming themselves? Which texts,

exercises, and methods do teachers adopt to explore dual language arts worlds, spaces, and borderlands? How are connections established between teachers and students about gaining one's selfhood for affirmation? Answers to these questions appear along with experiences and reflections for our consideration and heeding.

In the High School Matters, Lawrence Reiff discusses the importance of students reading Indigenous creation narratives and examining contexts and relationships. One of the Speaking My Mind essays, "Honoring Students' Experiences and Language" by Hannah Edber, readers learn about the cultural gifts and talents young people display when we notice, uplift, and value them. In the second essay, "Trusting the Process of Reading Assessment" by Gina Paese, recognizes the strengths of teacher knowledge and care when it comes to giving feedback about student learning and understanding.

April Zongker McNary writes about the origins of her inspiration to plan lessons that her students will experience and also redesign as the process evolves toward delivery and discovery. The teacher-poet Esteban Rodríguez introduces us to his poetic sensibilities and how a student who once challenged his instruction came to embrace poetry for communication, connections, and relationships. As a teacher and travelogue, Charles D. Carpenter takes us on a reflective journey to Rainy Mountain in southwestern Oklahoma as he explores a work by N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa novelist, short-story writer, essayist, and poet. Zander Nowell and Alexandria Smith present a unit on erased histories of the nondominant identities of their students, who embrace culturally sustaining instruction to question the world and to know themselves more deeply as learners and people.

April Vázquez guides us to her earliest discoveries of poetry and how her experiences as a young reader

of poetry also welcome her own students to the reading, study, and gift of verse today. Kristie Camp shows us how we can walk and write the borderlands while also writing in the brave outdoors with students, guiding and supporting them in language arts. Karen Lopez confirms that we can engage emergent bilingual learners in inquiry-based learning activities when we consider the rhetorical literacies of our diverse students in becoming learned and more confident. Heidi Saenz brings literature to life as she recounts her own narrative of coming of age in a time of political upheaval and human struggle for survival. In the last feature article for the issue, Holly Spinelli presents the Latinx voices in world literature that speak to her students' lives as they cocreate a culturally responsive learning environment and world for understanding.


The column essays present various topics that include the study of literature with a rhetorical approach, the benefits of National Writing Project regional networks, examination of Shakespeare's dexterity with language, and the value of antiracist teaching practices. Twelve poems by selected poets advance narrative verse in various forms.

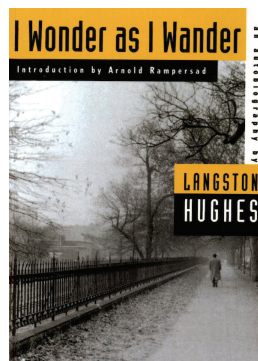
Viola Canales, who is a lecturer at Stanford Law School as well as an author of novels, short stories, and poetry, wraps up the issue with a reflective essay on learning and loss in the lives of the children and teachers of Annie Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Canales reminds us about the positive influences in the lives of learners and also how literacy changes many lives and our world.

Years ago, I remember reading a significant perspective that altered my way of seeing our hemispheric Americas and world and my own identities in the company of my neighbors and other earthlings. In the essay "Bienvenidos," Pat Mora notes, "Labels and labelers, the power of naming, do, of course, merit our scrutiny. Of all the bodies dwelling

on the Americas, why are we The Americans?" (7). Mora's question reminds me of my coming of age—long ago—when I read Mora's essay at age 17, as well as my work with twelfth graders today. While reading Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's memoir, my students and I pause as we connect with his story about "try[ing] to negotiate two worlds at once when only one of them was visible while the other one threatened to collapse. And yet I tried, but it came at a price" (8). For many of us, the "trying" continues today in our lives as teachers, librarians, students, and school support staff.

In one generation, does change happen that can expand the world? How are you influencing your students' lives and your own in our hemisphere and world? In the opening of *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey*, Langston Hughes explains, "When I was twenty-seven the stock-market crash came [in 1929]. When I was twenty-eight, my personal crash came. Then I guess I woke up. So, when I was almost thirty, I began to make my living from writing" (3). These four sentences sum up so much that can alter a life and career.

I am fortunate to maintain my optimism in a world that at times can feel quite busy and rushed across many spheres. My students remind me that busyness and haste are both inventions. Instead, there must be time to pause, wonder, wander, and notice by paying attention and guiding one's senses to what matters most today. Each of us is necessary, vibrant, and unique in our world; we matter to each other and for our survival. 



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The Importance of Teaching Indigenous Creation Narratives

LAWRENCE REIFF

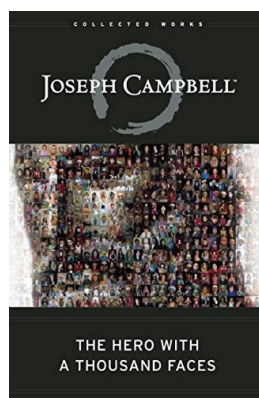
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My ninth-grade humanities students shuffled into the room to see the word *mythology* written on the whiteboard. I asked my students about their previous experiences with mythology. What kind of prior knowledge did they already have? As they gave me feedback, I added words such as *Zeus*, *Poseidon*, and *Remus* to the evolving web on the board. Despite years of mythology in both English and social studies classes, almost none had ever heard of Tepeu, Taawa, or the Sky Woman.

First-year humanities is a class at Roslyn High School that takes a humanities-based approach to English language arts. Too often we teach literature and writing in the vacuum of our English language arts classes. Roslyn's interdisciplinary approach maintains student engagement, fosters social justice, and better prepares students for the world beyond high school. We combine thematic literature units with social studies lessons. This gives students better context and understanding of literature and its place in history. We examine the symbiotic relationships between history, literature, and philosophy.

EXPLORING CULTURE THROUGH CREATION MYTHOLOGY

For the unit discussed here, we focus on the idea of creation stories, especially the creation stories of the Americas. Origin stories form a cultural backdrop that can help us understand another society. Questions of beginnings occur in every cultural group: *Why am I here? Where do I come from? Who am I?* Even today, these same questions are answered in part through stories handed from one generation to another. Origin stories give meaning to existence, define codes of morals, and bond societies together.



Most of my ninth graders are familiar with the common biblical creation narrative that takes place in the Garden of Eden, but they are completely unfamiliar with other creation stories. Origin stories can offer a window into how people live, how they relate to their environment, and what they believe about their place in the wider universe.

We begin with a large Venn diagram and small groups. Our goal is to look for common motifs in different creation stories while also looking for those unique aspects that show us what these cultures value(d). Together, the groups look at four different creation stories: the Popol Vuh, the story of the Spider Grandmother, the story of the Sky Woman, and the traditional western Judeo-Christian story of Adam and Eve. I continually remind my students that we are not looking at any of this for religious purposes. Instead, we're looking for some of the larger concepts and ideas that Joseph Campbell tells us to look for: chaos, endless water, mother or father figures, and an already existing natural world.

The Popol Vuh tells the creation narrative of the K'iche' people, Mayans whose civilization thrived during the postclassic period (950–1539 CE) and continues to the present. According to the Popol Vuh, there was endless nothingness until Tepeu, the Maker, and Gucumatz, the Feathered Spirit, manifested the ground itself (Alden Mason 55). Next they created animals to inhabit the land that was filled with trees, rivers, and mountains. Finally, Tepeu and Gucumatz decided to fabricate humans to watch over their creations. First, they tried to build people out of mud, but they weren't hearty enough and would crumble to dust soon after their inception.

Next, the gods tried hardened wood, but the newly formed humans were unable to speak and couldn't praise Tepeu and Gucumatz. The gods decided to wash their hands of the problem by destroying everything with a giant flood. Finally, the Mayan deities opted to fashion four humans from maize. This incarnation of humans was perfect, perhaps too perfect. The new people were sturdy and able to worship Tepeu and Gucumatz, but they could also have complete enlightenment and godlike powers. The makers removed these powers so the people's knowledge of the world would be weakened. Finally the creators used the same maize to create four women. The K'iche' believe that all people are descended from these original eight humans.

The Hopi creation narrative of the Spider Grandmother begins with Taawa, a spirit that lived alone in infinite space. As in other creation stories, Taawa created the natural world first. He created prairies and waterfalls, but there was no one to enjoy these beautiful things. So Taawa produced Kookyangwso'wuuti, the Spider Grandmother, who began to weave the land, the animals, the people, and everything else that exists. The Hopi creation narrative also involves the wrath of a higher power when the people lose their way. This time they are destroyed by fire until the Spider Grandmother shows them compassion and leads them through a *sipaapu*, a portal into a new world. Since this was an oral tale for thousands of years, there are some variations on the Uto-Aztec narrative (Esperon, 103).

The last Indigenous creation narrative we examine is the story of the Sky Woman, from the Iroquois people. According to the Iroquois myth, the only thing that existed before our world was an island in the sky. There, the immortal Sky People lived in total peace and happiness. One day, the Sky Woman informed her husband that she was pregnant with twins. In a rage, he pulled a tree out of the ground. The absence of the tree left a gaping hole in the island, and the Sky Man pushed his wife through the hole. As she plummeted, she was rescued by two birds who carried her on their backs. Sea creatures carried mud up from the bottom of the ocean and piled it onto the back of a giant turtle to create North America for the Sky Woman. The Sky Woman gave

birth to two sons, Flint and Sapling. Finally, the Sky Woman sprinkled dust into the air to create the sun, the moon, the stars, and humans. Sapling embodied all that was good and spent his time creating things that helped humans, such as boneless fish and edible berries. Flint, on the other hand, put the bones back into fish and placed thorns on berry bushes to antagonize humans.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

After reading these three Indigenous creation narratives, we spend some time reviewing the Western Judeo-Christian story that students are probably familiar with from the biblical book of Genesis. We look at our Venn diagrams and begin to notice some patterns emerging between these pre-Columbian creation narratives and the Judeo-Christian ones. Students notice that all of the narratives involve some sort of division of land from water. In most narratives, the natural world is created before human beings. Eventually humans emerge, but they may be flawed and, thus, destroyed.


The students also begin to notice some drastic differences. The creation narratives of Indigenous people of the Americas often place a greater importance on living in harmony with nature. There is no distinction between the spiritual world and the natural world. Unlike the creation narrative in the Old Testament, Indigenous creation narratives tend to have women playing much larger roles in the overall story. According to Campbell, "The mythological figure of the Universal Mother imputes to the cosmos the feminine attributes of the first, nourishing and protecting presence. The fantasy is primarily spontaneous; for there exists a close and obvious correspondence between the attitude of the young child toward its mother and that of the adult toward the surrounding material world" (103). In addition to the Hopi, the Wabanaki and the Inuit have female gods playing a primary role in creation. Studying these creation narratives helps us to understand what Indigenous people value(d)—for example, the role maize played in Mayan culture or the importance of being good stewards of the land that we occupy. Creation narratives can be considered the basis of morality, governments, and national identity.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Speculation about how the world came into being appears to be a basic element of all human cultures. By examining these narratives with students, we can gain a deeper understanding of the connection Indigenous people feel to the lands we call the Américas.

This leads me to ask my students to consider the bigger questions. How do these myths reflect the values of these people? How do our myths reflect our own values? My students begin to tell me about the myths and legends of their own cultures and how those stories help to shape their identities. My students begin to examine how the past affects their present. More importantly, we begin to discuss our current folk tales. My students love to ponder what future generations will think of some of our modern myths. We end the lesson by discussing this quote from a 2009 speech by US President Barack Obama at Cairo University: “All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit

ourselves to an effort—a sustained effort—to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.”

Above all, I want my students to understand that when we examine our collective creation myths, we find that all humans share some common ground. 

By examining these narratives with students, we can gain a deeper understanding of the connection Indigenous people feel to the lands we call the Américas.

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LAWRENCE REIFF is an English language arts and digital literacy educator for the Roslyn Union Free School District in Roslyn, New York. In 2011, he was named an Apple Distinguished Educator for his work with iPads and other technologies in the classroom. Lawrence has authored a number of articles, multi-touch books, lesson plans, and online courses for Apple, the Folger Library, Common Sense Media, and Google.

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: 2023 NCTE EARLY CAREER EDUCATOR OF COLOR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

This award supports early career teachers of color as they build accomplished teaching careers in literacy education. It is open to practicing preK- through university-level literacy educators of color who are in the first five years of a paid teaching career and who aspire to build a career in literacy education. You must be or become an NCTE member to receive this award. Submission information can be found on the NCTE website at ncte.org/awards/ncte-early-career-educator-teacher-of-color-leadership-award/; the submission deadline is **April 15, 2023**.

Honoring Students' Experiences and Language

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In the fall of 2021, I began teaching my school's first-ever multicultural literature course to seniors at my high school north of Atlanta. Because the course was neither an Advanced Placement (AP) course nor a gifted or accelerated course offering, my colleagues tried to prepare me for the students who would most likely register: "unmotivated" students with histories of poor academic performance, many of them Spanish-speaking and of Mexican origin. My colleagues' attitude toward these students exemplified deficit thinking (Delpit) in ways I found troubling.

To challenge these attitudes, I designed my course using scholarship on conceptions of cultural wealth, including linguistic, social, and familial capital for students of color (Yosso) and culturally validating frameworks for Latinx students (Rendón et al.). This scholarship urges teachers and administrators to offer asset-based ways for historically marginalized students to draw from rich resources of language and culture, and to develop curricula that recognize Latinx history and community. Because the US-Mexico border is often marginalized or misrepresented, we began the course with a critical exploration of borders.

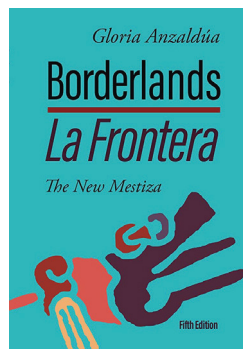
The book *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa transformed my own thinking about borders, and helped me understand how borders can be a source of both pain and strength to those who cross or face them. Anzaldúa's text combines English and Spanish, history and memoir, poetry and political essays about life on the US-Mexico border to challenge binarism (a way of thinking that provides only two options—e.g., good or bad, gay or straight, Mexican or American).

Beyond acting as simple dividing lines between "this place" and "that place," for Anzaldúa, borders are their own locations where identities, languages, and cultures are merged and inhabited. This liminal space is

the not-quite location that can feel both complicated and liberating. Complicated, because mainstream American culture relies heavily on binaries to easily sort people and ideas into recognizable or marginalized categories. Liberating, because naming how some identities, languages, and cultures are *neither/nor* or *both/and* can provide adolescents (young people who are in between childhood and adulthood) with the vocabulary to more accurately name their experiences.

I decided to teach Anzaldúa's book to my students to: (a) center my Mexican-origin students and highlight students' Spanish-language abilities, (b) critique binary conceptions of borders and identities, and (c) support all students to consider the variety of borders they cross and the liminal spaces they might experience. I urge teachers to adopt Anzaldúa's work to teach students how to critically examine what borders are, and where they come from, in order to critique and understand the lines that divide us. I also argue that Anzaldúa offers a perspective on border-crossing that can guide teachers and students to take up cultural, linguistic, and navigational wealth from border-crossing experiences.

I introduced the first few pages of Anzaldúa's first chapter to my students one brisk morning in October. It was one of those days when we could feel the seasons shift from one to the next, and the morning wind and late-afternoon sun reminded us that we were once again in the in-between, not still summer, not yet fall. The light glanced tentatively through the classroom windows. We read the opening chapter, "El otro México" ("The Other Mexico") aloud and all together at first; then, I divided students into four groups to more closely examine each of the four stanzas of poetry below the opening text in more detail. These stanzas use imagery from nature to illustrate the power of the natural environment over man-made borders, and the effects of man-made borders



on the speaker's body and mind. "But the skin of the earth is seamless," the speaker says. "The sea cannot be fenced" (Anzaldúa 3).

After we read the poem for the first time, I asked students what they noticed and wondered. Students noticed the use of Spanish; some wondered what the words meant. A few Spanish-speaking students, who usually sat quietly in class and often chose to speak only to me or to their Spanish-speaking peers, became animated in this discussion, excited to use their home language to provide translation for their non-Spanish-speaking peers.

As I split my students into groups, I asked them to consider the following questions:

1. What images stand out to you?
2. What does the speaker seem to be feeling?
3. What are you feeling as you read?

After ten minutes of small-group close-reading and discussion, students were ready to report out. They pointed out the imagery of the waves and the sea, of man-made objects (houses, fences, and barbed wire). They spoke to the fear and pain they identified in the author, and also the pride. They saw how the speaker was "split" but also whole, making her home on the dangerous edge between cultures and locations. Students named their own feelings: confusion, concern, excitement, connection.

"What seems to be stronger?" I asked my students after each group had shared out. "Nature, or man-made objects?"

"Nature," one student pointed out, adding that in the poem, the sea destroys the border fence, and cannot be stopped or held by borders.

"Are borders natural?" I asked. The class shook their heads, or whispered, or called out: "No!"

In the days that followed, my students gravitated toward one central question: What borders do you cross, and how are these borders a source of pain and/or a source of strength? We discussed the history of the US-Mexican border, and the Indigenous civilizations who ruled the land for thousands of years before Spanish invasion. We examined spiritual beliefs that combine Catholicism and Aztec symbolism. Some students bravely volunteered to share the story of their own border-crossing, or those of their families. Students

also named their *both/and* identities: queer, multiracial, American and immigrant, fearful and hopeful. In doing so, students were able to voice the complexities of their identities, languages, and ways of being.

My approach to the text was to move beyond borders with my students, and to honor humanity and agency as we navigated and transgressed (hooks) the borders that unduly limit our lives. For teachers who wish to pursue this work in their English language arts classrooms, I suggest these key practices:

1. Teach history by drawing from sources that highlight untold and/or marginalized historical voices.
2. Honor students' languages. Encourage students to write and speak in their home language(s), and use mentor texts to show how this can be done.
3. Use multimodal sources, including musical and visual texts, to increase student access and engagement.
4. Incorporate choice for students to determine how much they'd like to share from their own experiences. This is particularly important for inclusion and for racially and/or linguistically marginalized students who might otherwise bear the brunt of educating their monolingual peers who speak White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell).

To do this work more fully, we as teachers can provide more opportunities for students to draw from their own lives and literacies. Students can bring in texts or sources of inspiration (including family members or friends) that have helped them traverse borders in different ways. Teachers can also share their own relationships to borders: I shared my family's experience crossing European borders during the Nazi Holocaust and immigrating to the United States. By offering vulnerability, I deepened relationships with students in ways that better allowed us to have critical conversations together.

My approach was to move beyond borders with my students, and to honor humanity and agency as we navigated and transgressed the borders that unduly limit our lives.

TABLE 1
Suggestions for Additional Texts



Texts Centering Migration and Immigration in the Americas	Texts Centering Immigration around the World
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Voces Sin Fronteras: Our Stories, Our Truth</i>, a graphic novel from the Latin American Youth Center • <i>Solito, Solita: Crossing Borders with Youth Refugees from Central America</i>, edited by Steven Mayers and Jonathan Freedman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Best We Could Do</i>, a graphic novel by Thi Bui. • Student-writing anthology <i>We the Dreamers: Youth Authors Explore the American Dream</i>

Teachers may consider exploring additional student-facing texts on immigration.

When teachers face borders alongside their students, we can see young people beyond imposed and labeled deficits, and support their brilliance, strength, and vulnerability in powerful ways. **EJ**

Finally, teachers who wish to examine and discuss geopolitical, linguistic, and/or cultural border-crossing might turn to additional texts (see Table 1).

As you approach these texts with your students, consider asking:

1. What borders do you see or hear? Where do these borders come from?
2. How do borders affect people’s lives, relationships, opportunities, and/or identities?
3. How do people resist borders?
4. What connections can you make to other texts, to the world, to yourself?

These questions can help us to liberate ourselves from the borders designed to hold us back from each other. Honoring my students’ voices, ideas, and language allowed me to connect with them across our strengths and differences. Our classroom became a space of shared struggle and deep mutual respect.

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Trusting the Process of Reading Assessment

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I believe classroom teachers, not producers of standardized tests, are best qualified to instruct and assess students.

I bring this belief to my current role as an assistant teaching professor. My program is part of a public university serving inservice and preservice teachers placed in urban schools in a city in the American Midwest. This essay is in response to an anonymous student's question posted on a spring 2020 course evaluation: *How do I trust my ability to instruct and assess students while navigating a pandemic, even though my school district seems determined to move on from the pandemic?*

This question moved me. I acknowledge that encouraging others to trust the process is abstract at best, and at worst, intimidating to novice teachers. I recalled a time when I was challenged to engage in a new way of teaching that was grounded in following the lead of the students. During the 2012–13 school year, I completed dissertation research while full-time teaching eighth grade English language arts (ELA) in the northeastern United States. That year, I also faced my fears about state tests. My fears were not unfounded: my end-of-year rating was tied to students' yearly progress, as were students' acceptances to specialized high school programs in our school district.

I asked myself: How do we circumvent the standardized gaze and place energy into more humane ways of assessing students? I learned the following lessons as I inquired into the disconnect between district mandates and the day-to-day work of reading with adolescents. The lessons are worth revisiting even ten years later as the teaching of reading continues to evolve with an even more rapidly changing world.

LESSON 1: LIMITATIONS SHOULD NOT LIMIT OPPORTUNITIES

Without neglecting assigned duties, I wanted to enact what I believe is best for students: to engage in

personally meaningful reading and use their minds in ways that bring them joy. I sought permission to host an after-school book club.

With my principal's support, I visited each class in our school, inviting students to work with me after school to read and discuss books we would choose together and, hopefully, to make friends. Sixteen students (ages eleven and twelve) and I met for eight months, three times per week, for an hour and a half per meeting. The small class size and natural autonomy of a book club scheduled to meet after school hours supported me to take chances that I was not yet ready to take in the ELA classroom.

LESSON 2: HONOR STUDENTS' SELF-AGENCY

All club members chose books and engaged in coplanning our daily agenda, which typically followed this structure:

- Welcome: snack and organizing our space (fifteen minutes)
- Warm-up: a physical warm-up, followed by a read-aloud or discussion of a book excerpt; students took turns planning and leading (fifteen minutes)
- Independent reading: students read self-selected books (twenty minutes)
- Creating and sharing: students responded to books using reader's notebook entries (see Figure 1), partner chats, drawing, whole-group conversations, reenactment, and dramatic readings (twenty minutes)
- Closing: reflective journal-writing and goal setting (five minutes)

The students' ownership of the agenda supported me to focus on assessment practices embedded in

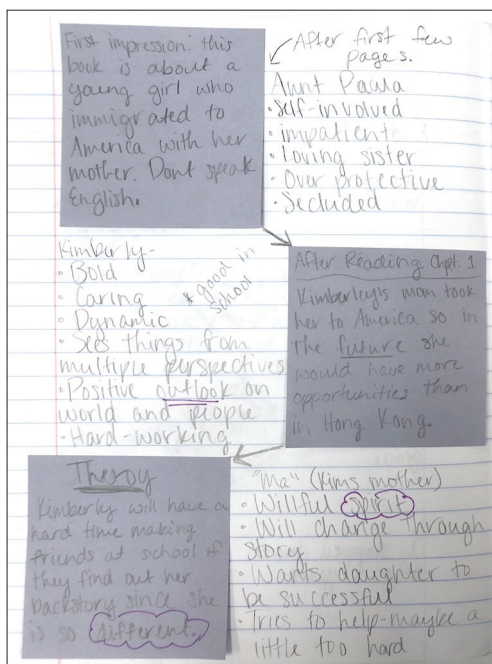


FIGURE 1
A student lists her first impressions of the characters in *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok.

the activities listed above. As a result, I focused on inquiring into the reading life of each student using these assessment routines:

- Independent reading: I met with one student to talk. I asked, “What most intrigues you in this book?” and “What would you most like others to know about your reading?”
- Creating and sharing: I observed students’ activities, documented conversation, analyzed response levels, and noted ideas to model for the next day’s warm-ups.
- Closing: Each night, I read students’ journals, wrote notes to them, and offered invitations for next steps.

LESSON 3: SHIFT FROM ASSESSMENT-TO-FIX TO ASSESSMENT-AS-INQUIRY

During the student-led welcome and warm-up, I listened. These instances of student participation taught me even more. Three months into our work,

Patricia (all student names are pseudonyms) led a warm-up and then shared:

Today my ELA teacher took my paper away when I was writing a poem about the book. She kept it, gave me a new sheet of paper and told me to redo it. “Use text-based details,” she said. I wanted my poem back. I was angry with her. She doesn’t trust me to read the book!

Other students added what they wished their ELA teachers would or would not do:

CHARLOTTE: I like to stop to talk about what I’m reading with a friend, but my teacher tells me, “Don’t talk.”

JANA: In school we just read a book and answer questions about it.

MAYA: I like to stop to free-write in my journal when I read. It helps me get more into the book.

BRIAN: But I don’t like when the teacher makes us all stop to write at the same time. It should be real. We can be trusted to write when we know it’s right.

Their words told me that reading was no longer reading if they felt someone was trying to control their minds. Teachers were not intending to silence these students’ responses to reading; we were doing the best with what we understood at the time to be valid and reliable reading assessment.

Reading was no longer reading if they felt someone was trying to control their minds.

I then adjusted my approach to literature discussion, committing to listening to students’ ideas over imposing my own ideas that were usually based on getting them to meet standards. These reminders supported me to revise my teaching practices:

1. Speak less.
2. Ask open-ended questions.
3. Use wait time.
4. Enter into the student conversation intentionally.
5. Pose follow-up questions equally dependent on text and on what students say.

6. Be invitational about reading, thinking, or discussing.
7. Scribe student talk as much as possible.
8. Review scribed student talk often to consider future work, response menus, and annotation guides.

LESSON 4: AESTHETIC RESPONSES HAVE HUMANIZING IMPACTS

Ensuing conversations revealed that the students' senses of themselves were strengthening, and highlighted the benefits of aesthetic responses (Rosenblatt 124). During our last month they initiated conversation around their current books:

MAYA: I am reading *Wringer*. A boy has a hard time wringing pigeons' necks. He doesn't want to do it, but his whole town has a tradition around it. He's different from others—not afraid. He doesn't only stick with cool people. This book shows me I don't have to be embarrassed of who I am.

YVETTE: My book is called *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. Edward got thrown off a boat and he went through so many miseries. It compares to life because there are many obstacles that come our way. It's hard. There will be ups and downs.

CHARLOTTE: I know what you mean. My book is called *Crazy Love*. It's about abuse. There's a child in my building that gets . . . But even though that happens, there are many real things that are so bad in our own lives. What I really learn from these books is that people go through even worse things.

DANIELLE: I notice when we talk about our books we talk about our lives. You can go through life with books.

JAKE: I agree; I am who I am because of books.


Their words revealed that they wanted to feel free to consider their lives as they thought about books—and perhaps they wanted others to wholeheartedly listen.

HOW DO WE TRUST OUR ABILITIES TO ASSESS STUDENT READING?

Writing this essay supports me to support teachers to trust the process. I now say to teachers: trust in an assessment process that prescribes students' input as the mandate and state standards as a guide. To do this:

1. Focus learning experiences on students' choices.
2. Avoid prompting students to revise their responses too soon—support them to elaborate and say more.
3. Document student work: transcribe conversations and analyze written responses.
4. Study your documentation to understand the dimensions of students' reading.
5. Connect findings about students' responses to standards.
6. Plan modeling to support students to dig deeper.

Most teachers I work with express their desire to connect with students—not their goal to know the standards. The steps above outline a process that prioritizes students' voices in reading, which in turn supports teachers to personally connect with students through assessment.

Students are the largest stakeholders in education; we have an obligation to stay close to the ideas that speak to their souls. Their personal choices, preferences, and ideas—*not itemized norm-referenced reports from computer-based assessment*—keep teachers closest to what their hearts need most, so that, as Danielle said, they may learn how to “go through life with books.” 

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Counselor's Office

Oddly hunched, as if she thought she
 were too tall, thin as a straw, a belt,
 a needle, blonde bangs long, never
 flipped or drawn to the side, never
 tucked behind an ear, she is often
 weary even after sleeping in, even
 on Christmas at dawn, not mute,
 but dragged from the quicksand
 of a silence inside her to reunite
 with the voice that has abandoned
 her so often she has almost forgotten
 how much she loves it, cannot quite
 forgive it, persuades herself she
 doesn't really need it anymore.
 Though she has never been voiceless, her pencils
 and paints, stories and sketches speak
 (her poem: the lonely old man who falls in a well;
 her drawing: the wide-eyed child, shocked).
 Few hear *this* voice though. Almost no one
 speaks this other language of hers.
 Today some muse nudges her in the school counselor's
 office—to awaken, to straighten her back
 for a moment, to draw her bangs to the side,
 look someone in the eye and unsmother
 the urge to *say* aloud:

*I have thought about ending things and how
 (as if also to say, I am here. Help me stay).*

—MARY M. BROWN

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A retired literature and creative writing professor, **MARY M. BROWN** lives in Anderson, Indiana. Many of her students were English education majors, some of whom she observed or supervised in their student teaching assignments. Mary can be reached at maryiwubrown@gmail.com.

Public Education

We hold no state tournaments
 for kindness, wave no purple
 and gold pompons, raise no
 banners nor break-through
 hoops to show our support for
 champions of human dignity.

We hire no coaches
 holding colored markers to draw up
 plays designed to ensure victory
 over indecency. We do not
 practice on a court of wisdom
 or train in a pool of sympathy. We
 award no trophies for
 the most winning empathy.

Nor do we test for restraint or
 nonviolence. We provide no special
 classes in the art of living beyond
 reproach. We fail to
 conduct children in orchestrating
 justice, never watch
 from bleachers as they practice
 patience on a field or applaud
 as they crown
 someone king or queen
 of benevolence, courage, hope.

—MARY M. BROWN

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Igniting the Lesson

A teacher shares the inspiration for lessons and how she implemented her language arts ideas in the classroom for her students to experience.

“H

ow do you do that?”

I am asked this often when someone sees me begin to manically scribble notes that only I can understand.

When my family and I drive up north of Phoenix, I get a spark from an idea, seemingly out of nowhere. I verbalize the idea, and my husband will undoubtedly ask, “Why are you working?”

“Why *am* I working?”

I sit with my idea and let it marinate in the curriculum I have taught for the last fifteen years.

I am going to be honest: I don't exactly know *how* or *why* my brain flickers in the heat of a new idea, but I try to position myself in a path that inspires me. To do so, though, I open myself up to possibilities. And in doing so, I find that I allow the creative process to take the wheel . . . even if I know I may be headed toward a dead end.

Truthfully, the dead-end ideas sometimes come back to life in another form I never expected. Indeed, there is a beauty in these gems, too! While a spark is difficult to promise to another teacher, I can reflect on the times these sparks occurred and where the teaching journey has led me.

READING INSPIRED

I am lucky to have surrounded myself with readers throughout my life. Thus, I read regularly, too. Plus, let's face it, I'm an English language arts teacher among teachers. We love to *read*. Am I right?!

Many times, when I read, I think, *How can I use this idea in class?* I don't always consider implementing the text. Rather, I think about how to incorporate a scene, theme, symbol, concept, and so on.

During the 2017 winter break, I read the charming book *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate. (She might be most recognized for *The One and Only Ivan*.) While *Wishtree* is told from the perspective of a tree, the novel is filled with conversation starters such as the power of hate, racism, love, friendship, community, and more. While this book is for a younger audience than my tenth-grade students, I liked the community that came together by tying wishes written on cloth strips to hang on a special tree each spring.

Because I had a box of fabric in my classroom, I knew I had the materials. Instead of asking students to consider New Year's resolutions in January 2018, I asked them to make a *wish* for 2018. They wrote their wishes on fabric strips, and I told them I would keep their wishes safe until May.

The students tied their wishes to strips of rope that I hung over our classroom windows (see Figure 1). Their swaying wishes dangled above us as we continued our learning experience together. At the end of the school year, each student took their wish home. This act of

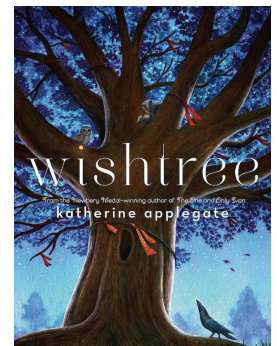




FIGURE 1
April's students tie their wishes to a piece of rope.

teaching and learning was something so simple, yet the students enjoyed the miniature activity to kick off 2018 and our second semester together.

MOVIE MAGIC

I appreciate a good movie because I love a thought-provoking plot. Watching movies during breaks is one of my favorite pastimes. *Love, time, death*, and how these ideas connect us all is the theme of the 2016 film *Collateral Beauty*. As I watched this movie, I cried, I laughed, and I pondered the concept of writing physical letters to *love, time, and death*. *What would I say? Would I curse, rant, and rave or show graciousness, gratitude, and love?*

While I knew I would not show this film in class, I sometimes show movie trailers to ignite ideas before jumping into some thought-provoking writing, and that's what I did.

Each Friday, my students write a full-page journal entry based on three teacher-provided prompts (two of the prompts are on specific learning topics, while the third is always a freewrite option). Each week, I respond to all 150 or more of my students. (I make comments in the margins of their entries.)

The Friday after I first watched this film, I showed the *Collateral Beauty* movie trailer, then presented the following prompt: "Write a letter to Time, Love, and/or Death. What would you say?" While

some of the students were mystified by the concept of writing a letter to an abstract idea, others ran with the opportunity. The first year I included this idea in my journal prompts, a student wrote a powerfully moving letter to both death and love. I wiped tears as I read his entry that week. His letter was filled with anger—and rightfully so—but there was an undeniable raw beauty to his words.

Year after year, students who choose to respond to the prompt write with inspiring, raw passion. Maybe because *time, love, and death* are universal truths that hit us all at some point, which makes the assignment such a relatable prompt.

CULTURE CROSSOVER

Because my birthday is on November 1 and I am half Mexican, the significance of the date of my birth lives on. In our culture, we celebrate *El día de los muertos* (the Day of the Dead). This beautiful tradition of honoring deceased loved ones on November 1 and 2 is celebrated by the Pixar film titled *Coco*, released in 2017. Each year my family goes to the cemetery and cleans off the headstones of my grandparents and my *tías*. We sit on warm flannel blankets, play music by Vicente Fernández through a Bluetooth speaker, entertain a few rounds of Uno, and visit the loved ones we miss. In our home, we respectfully set up an altar (see Figure 2). These are my American spins on a day of remembrance and honor.

At my school, half of the student population looks like me, Latinx with ties to Mexico and its rich cultures. While most students do not participate in the cemetery traditions, I've learned that many put up altars in their homes. (This is done more throughout Mexico as well.) Based on my teaching experience, I believe we should invite our students to celebrate culture in schools and beyond the assigned calendar celebration months. Change can happen when we invite our students to grow and share.

I needed to find a way to bring my students' cultural knowledge into their classroom. I started by setting up my own *ofrenda* on my classroom windowsill to honor authors who had passed away. (See Figure 3, which shows the pictures printed in color and placed in Dollar Tree photo frames.) I spread out their images on one of my Mexican scarves with



FIGURE 2
April's personal ofrenda honors deceased family members.

battery-operated tealight candles and handmade, colorful crepe-paper flowers. Above the authors' ofrenda hung *papel picado*, which I had purchased at a Día de los Muertos festival.

The class ofrenda was a start, but now I needed to figure out how to get the students involved. Students created their author ofrendas using shoe boxes to contain their projects.

My mom, a retired teacher, visited to teach students how to make crepe-paper flowers. She brought the materials: colorful tissue paper and green pipe cleaners. Our school librarian, Patricia Jimenez, was a guest presenter who offered her experience setting up an altar each year by recreating her ofrenda, including family pictures and other assorted objects, on a table in the front of our classroom.

Students worked on their ofrendas in groups or individually. Their projects revealed the students'



FIGURE 3
Our classroom ofrenda honors authors we study and who have passed away.

care, memories, and thoughtfulness. There was class time for students to assemble their ofrendas and, once they finished, they presented their projects to the class and offered insights into the details of their artifacts, memories, and mementos. Ms. Jimenez displayed the students' final work in our school library, and other classes were allowed to walk through to view the ofrendas on display as an art and remembrance gallery.

While I love the concept of this idea, I have attempted this assignment only twice. The first time

was a mess. Some students did not take the assignment seriously and did not bother to research the author who was assigned. The second year, I included more checkpoints, but more was needed to match my expectations. While I am not giving up on the idea, I need time to reflect on where I must rework this assignment.

I knew I could no longer assign a final exam on the last day of school. I needed to hear every student's voice one last time . . . in our space, together.

The goal is for students to discover authors in a culturally respectful way.

Teaching culture in the classroom is a responsibility not to be taken lightly nor to be confused with cultural appropriation. There must be a space in the classroom to learn and discover culture from an educated adult with culturally responsive intentions. Intention matters, so until I do more research, ask more questions, and engage in more dialogue, this assignment will be shelved. This is an idea I will continue to mold over time, and I share this as a teacher who is still learning and relearning.

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

Traditionally, our school reserves the last two days of the year for final exams. When I was a beginning teacher, I didn't question much, so I made sure my students completed a final exam on the last day of school. At some point, the quality of what I taught and how I taught began to change. The connections between the students and me became more genuine. Our class discussions became richer. The sharing of our writing became more necessary. As a result,

I knew I could no longer assign a final exam on the last day of school. I needed to hear every student's voice one last time . . . in our space, together.

I still assign a final exam, but the exam takes place prior to the last day of school. In place of the traditional last-day-of-school final, I charge every student with polishing something they wrote during the school year. This could be a poem, journal entry, personal narrative, or goodbye letter to the class. The goal is to read something meaningful and sincere. I join my students, and my choice has been to write a goodbye letter to each class. I never write the same letter twice.

On the last day of school, we put all the desks in a circle facing inward. I tell students I will read last, so I look to my right and then to my left to see who is going to start the readings. It has become a natural reaction for the students on either side of me to play paper-rock-scissors to see who will go first; sometimes a brave student volunteers without hesitation.

One by one, we listen as each student reads aloud something they wrote and polished. I always remind students ahead of time that we serve as witnesses to what is shared. Our job, when not reading, is to listen free of judgment. Depending on the class dynamics, the students applaud each student after each offering. A beautiful experience unfolds before us as we listen to all the sophomores read their words. Tears become part of the reading and experience as some students choose to truly share their most honest feelings and vulnerabilities.

During the 2021–22 school year, my student Marcos (pseudonym), who was always full of energy in my seventh-period class, choked up as he thanked me for writing back to him in his journal each week. He said he appreciated that an adult took the time to respond to his writing. Marcos felt heard. Of course, I smile, wink, and cry as students confess their truths during that last time we sit together in our classroom.

The end of the 2021–22 academic year was a little different. As we sat for the first round of these beautiful and reflective end-of-the-year readings, there was a tragic car accident, which killed a student who had sat in my class in the fall before transferring to another school. On top of this, another school massacre occurred in Uvalde, Texas. Because

the news is not part of our class and I am not one to check my phone at school, I was unaware of the loss taking place until I got home.

As I made dinner, with one more half-day left before the start of summer, I listened to the news, and I cried. My heart, similar to many teachers' hearts and lives, feels too heavy to carry at times. I revised my last letters to my classes. This is what I read to my seventh-period class:

7th period:

My wild but lovable bunch . . . you know, some teachers talk about how they don't like their 7th hour. I always say the opposite. I don't know what it is, but I always seem to have the best students in my 7th hour. This year is no exception.

I never feel like a year is long enough to teach you all that I want to teach you. The truth is, you were capable of doing everything I asked and more. Most of you rose to the challenge, and I respect you for this. Know that I am proud of you and I respect your efforts. To the rest of you, know that life is going to be harder than anything I assigned. When faced with challenges, I hope you choose to be the problem-solvers of the world.

I hope that you all go out and conquer the world. Life is too short to always sit on the sidelines, waiting to be chosen. Be the hero of your own story.

Yesterday, while I made dinner, I cried as I listened to the news. As much as I wish I could, I can't protect you from the world with pencils, paper, and motivational posters. Go out in the world and make it a better place. Do all the things you need to do. Say all the things that need to be said. Tomorrow is promised to no one. Live fully and deeply today and every day forward.

Stop by anytime you need or want to. You know where to find me. I'll always be your teacher.

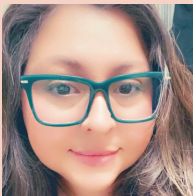
*With love,
Ms. McNary*

Never again will I assign a final exam on the last day of a school year.

My students—their voices, their writing, their connections to each other and to me—are too important to silence with a final exam. They must be heard and ignited. **EJ**

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: 2023 NCTE INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AWARD

This award is given to individuals, groups, and institutions that merit recognition for advancing the cause of intellectual freedom. Award categories are (1) a national award and (2) an NCTE affiliate-based award. Submission information can be found on the NCTE website at <https://ncte.org/awards/ncte-intellectual-freedom-national/>. We welcome submissions from any NCTE member for the national award. Award submissions are due by **June 15, 2023**.

Crossing into New Sanctuaries: Poetic Pedagogy for the Often Unseen

A teacher-poet reflects on a student for whom language arts came alive and became relevant and worthy of understanding.

Sometimes a former student enters our lives again and reminds us not only why we became teachers, but how impactful we can be given our instruction, guidance, and care, even if the impact only lasts briefly.

This was the case on my way home from work one afternoon in the spring of 2022, when I reflected on a student I taught for two years.

At a stoplight in Austin, Texas, I looked to my left at the AutoZone parking lot, where about a half dozen cars—discolored, uneven, paint flaking from their doors—were parked with their hoods open. For a moment, I believed that what I was witnessing was actually a car show, like the ones my teenaged twin uncles used to take me to when I was ten.

At the car show, there had been a sense that each of the men standing by their cars had accomplished something only they themselves could claim. I saw that same pride at the AutoZone parking lot: men bent over a struggling engine, men wiping grease stains from their cheeks and foreheads, men looking as though they had just clocked out of a half-day shift at a construction site, a fast-food restaurant, or some place that offered honest work but an unsteady paycheck. I pressed the brake to create space between my car and the vehicle in front, but instead of focusing more on the men or the cars that still needed work, I stared at the corner of the store and noticed the memorial of flowers in the shape of a cross.

The local news report revealed it was a love triangle. An argument ensued, followed by punches

and two shots that stopped the man who was trying to shove David, my former student, onto the ground. (All students' names are pseudonyms.) The report said that David shot this man in the chest, and that he was on the run. David's photo was shown, similar to a mugshot, but it also looked as though a friend of his had taken the photo.

David never smiled, at least not enough for anyone who knew him to describe him as the type of person to let the corner of his lips curve, to show emotions other than stoic, angry, indifferent. But I remembered what could only be called a smile when the poems he studied in my English language arts (ELA) class finally made sense.

There is always at least one moment in our teaching career when we realize we are supposed to be *in* the classroom, not necessarily out of any feeling that we've found our purpose, but because we know that we *can* make a small, and yet positive, difference in a student's life. In this article, I share the teacher-student relationship that I developed with David, as well as the practices that made my instruction relatable to David, instilling confidence in him as a student and reader of poetry and in my teaching style for future students.

LIMBO

During David's junior year, the 2017–18 academic year, the class of ninety-three students was divided according to their academic abilities. This accounted for the previous year's grades, test scores, and the

sophomore teachers' perceptions of student motivation, which could depend on anything from the length of a student's free responses to how long it took to pick up their pencils in their classes. I recognize that gauging students' motivation is subjective, as a lot of teaching can be, but my first-period Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition class, which David was a part of, lagged a few years behind in reading level.

Some students' reading levels were at seventh grade, at best, while other students read at a ninth-grade level. One student read at a fifth-grade level and, even as a first-year AP teacher, my job was to teach her how to compose argumentative, rhetorical analysis, and synthesis essays. I also had to teach her to read excerpts of nonfiction texts that were as grammatically dense as they were stale. I, too, could barely stand to read the multiple-choice passages, dissect the author's purpose, and infer the meaning behind paragraphs of description filled with too many commas and semicolons. What was I to do?

David knew that he was in the less advanced course the moment he entered our classroom and saw his classmates. At the school where I taught, as well as within the entire district, juniors had no option but to take the AP English Language and Composition course if they were to graduate under the Distinguished Achievement Program for the state of Texas. One week into David's junior year, after I read aloud the 2017 argumentative prompt on the role of artifice based on an excerpt from *Empire of Illusion* by Chris Hedges, I asked my students what they thought *artifice* meant given the context clues.

David shouted, "How come this is the dumb class?"

I reserved my sudden urge to chuckle in disbelief, not because I thought there was any validity to his statement, but because of his bluntness, of how he knew, without such graceful language, that the twenty-four students here likely experienced learning at a different pace than their peers in the other classes.

"Why do you think this is the dumb class?" I asked.

"Because it is," he said. "We have every class together, and we can barely finish a lesson."

"I don't think anyone is dumb," I said, knowing he'd be less than convinced.

"Yeah, right!" he responded.

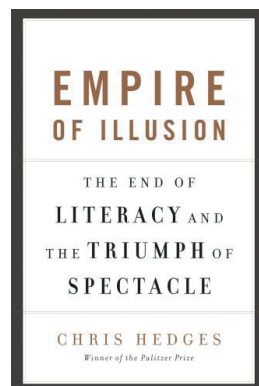
To save the conversation from becoming a larger tangent, I went back to our lesson, asked what *artifice* meant again, and was met with silence.

THE CROSSING

David's attitude changed during the school year as the course continued and the learning evolved more deliberately. I learned our administrators admitted that behavioral issues and test scores did not amount to the results they had expected to see when they'd made their plan the previous year. Moreover, they added that, in reality, it was not worth the hassle to repeat the experience with this new school's first graduating class. As a result, I moved up with my juniors, but my classes were now mixed, filled both with students who were ready to write college-level essays and with those whose idea of writing depended on repeating the same examples to fill space on the page. I couldn't teach everyone everything, but I was intent on studying poetry with them.

When I had taught poetry to first-year students at my previous high school, they had created portfolios for the second-quarter unit. They'd tried their hand at sonnets, and they'd included pictures and magazine cutouts of celebrities with most of their poems because poetry, as they remembered me saying, was visual. What was more visual than pictures of themselves and their best friends with the perfectly cut head of some teenage boy who starred in a series my twenty-something-year-old self had absolutely no idea about?

I remember Litzy, my top student and the eventual valedictorian of her class, and how her portfolio included a sonnet to Justin Bieber, walking a fine line between admiration and sarcasm. I remember Miguel's poem titled "Poetry Is . . ." and his extended metaphor



connecting poetry and biology, how he saw the two subjects as interrelated and wrote each line with such confidence:

Poetry Is . . .

Poetry is a strand
of DNA in its process
of transcription.
Poetry is a strand of
mRNA bringing out a
message full of codons
.....

Poetry is a way of
expressing yourself without
any codon left behind
.....

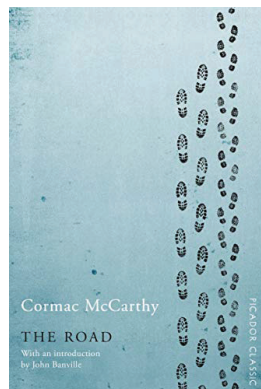
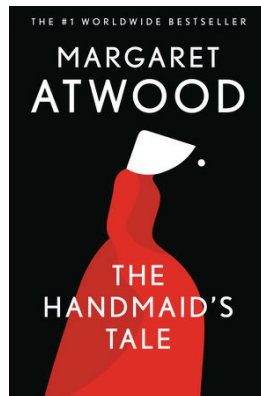
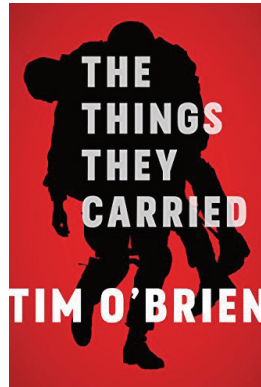
Poetry is as important
as tRNA carrying its
correct amino acid
.....

Poetry is a polypeptide
chain that has built
itself correctly.

Poetry means your
ribosome is making
the correct proteins
.....

Poetry is the process
of protein synthesis . . .

There were times when I'd felt as though I were pulling teeth throughout the lesson unit, and I thought that this



My goals were ambitious: one novel a month and one poem a week. Before school began, I obtained excerpts and copies of the first few books we would be reading: *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, the latter of which I assigned as summer reading. A packet of about sixty contemporary poems were provided for reading and analysis throughout the year.

We read *The Road* for the first few weeks, then proceeded to *The Catcher in the Rye*, which frustrated nearly every one of my students because, in their words, they couldn't relate to such a "privileged" teenager. It wasn't, however, until we arrived at *The Handmaid's Tale* that students began to take a keen interest in reading. They began to understand Atwood's characters and themes, which in turn—at least from what I felt and saw—helped with the momentum of students reading and completing the weekly assignment for the poems. Students completed a SOAPStone (speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, tone) analysis for the poem of the week.

I classified David, who was in my third-period class, as engaged but with a personality that sometimes stopped the class, collectively, from participating on

I classified David as engaged but with a personality that sometimes stopped the class, collectively, from participating on a more serious level, and he rejected Atwood's novel outright.

year's experience would be the same. And these were seniors! The finish line was less than a year away, and with at least five AP classes they were required to take (biology, US government, microeconomics, statistics, and my class), why would a few lines of verse matter to them now or in the future?

They perhaps wouldn't, but that didn't stop me from trying.

a more serious level, and he rejected Atwood's novel outright. David refused to think about theocracy, reproductive rights, or what it might mean to him and those he cared about if governmental entities stripped their freedoms.

David sat near the back of the class, by the window, and although he would pay attention to my brief lectures, write down notes, and read the excerpts of the book we reviewed together, he refused to attempt the assignments or read anything beyond the few paragraphs I had selected in advance for the class to examine more closely. I thought I had lost David for good, that this would be a repeat of last year and

that he would sit through class, holding on to the notions of who he was as a student in the same way that he had not too long before.

SANCTUARY

One day I asked him why he wasn't doing the assignments related to the novel. I expected him to say it was boring, that it sounded like it was written in the 1800s, that frankly, he just didn't care about the story at all, which were the usual statements I'd heard from my students over the years. But instead, David said he was more interested in reading the poems, especially the ones by Javier Zamora and Erika L. Sánchez.

"What do you like about these poems?" I asked.

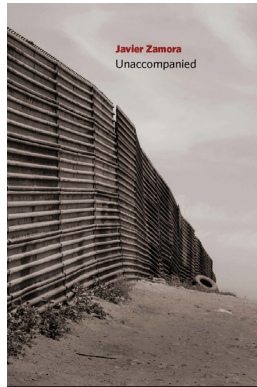
Reluctantly, David said, "I like that they sound like how I would talk. And how they talk about stuff I know."

"You like how they use English and Spanish?"

"Yeah. Like I've never seen that done before. It sounds like I could have written it."

In an ideal world, a teacher could give a lesson and students, after absorbing the information or concepts of that lesson, would complete the assignment they were given with relative ease. Yes, one would expect clarifying questions and hypotheticals tossed their way, but it would be engaging, there would be serious inquiries as much as there would be laughter, and students would be talking about the content that their teacher presented on their way out of class. There is no ideal world, however, and while I found that many students connected with the substance of what I taught, there were just as many who did not.

David did not connect with the novels. While I could have given him failing scores for the assignments related to those novels, called his mother and told her that her son was not meeting expectations, or simply ignored him and let him become someone who did less than the bare minimum, I did not. I wanted David to choose what he wanted to learn, and he wanted to learn poetry.



That day, students were reading a chapter of *The Handmaid's Tale* independently or with their shoulder partner, as well as answering a series of inference questions. There was a small hum of talking, but all I could hear was David's explanation of the poem "Second Attempt Crossing" by Javier Zamora.

"I had some family," David said, "that didn't make it to the United States when they first tried." I nodded after

hearing this.

David continued, "And what's kind of cool about this poem is that it's more like a story, not like a poem poem."

David said he liked this elegy to Chino (who the speaker thanks for helping him avoid *La Migra*, or US immigration authorities), and he wondered if it was actually true.

I shared some details about Zamora, how he and his family fled from the Salvadoran civil war, and how his poetry volume, *Unaccompanied*, documents his journey and the country he left behind. We looked at the poem in the packet together and, without prompting, David said he could connect with the following lines: "¡'La Migra!' and everyone ran. / In that dried creek where 40 of us slept, we turned to each other / and you flew from my side in the dirt" (4–6).

It can be considered an offensive joke to yell "¡La Migra!" if you are Latinx with privileges, a jest which I would hear often from some uncles, aunts, or peers in high school who wanted to make light of sirens in the distance, or, strangely enough, of how fast someone was running. Here, however, David could sense the seriousness of the phrase, and it drew him in.

As I listened more intently to David's words, I learned that the scene reminded him of an experience his family had to go through but which he was spared. He recounted a story of how his older cousin outran US Border Patrol agents, how it seemed as though he were about to get apprehended, but how he was lucky to have separated from his group and hidden



under a bush until night descended and it was safe to move farther north.

“It’s crazy what happens,” he noted, then stared back at the page.

I imagined that he was imagining himself in that position.

The next week, we spoke about the poem “Narco” by Erika L. Sánchez, but this time, David had conflicted feelings. The poem begins with the speaker describing the indifference of the desert, the restlessness of the sky, and Rompe-madres (Mother-breaker), the narco (drug trafficker). There is something akin to pride in these first few lines, such as the kind found in the lyrics of corridos, and for a moment it appears as though the poem will celebrate narcos. But then the poem shifts violently, and we witness Rompe-madres pulling “a woman / from a bus and onto the thorns and dirt” (lines 10–11). There is then a juxtaposition of the seemingly innocent words “Hummingbirds” and “Milkweed,” which almost dilute the character Rompe-madres’ actions, but a few lines down we find nothing short of a tragic ending: “Rompe-madres wipes the sweat / from his eyes, and ties her panties to a creosote bush— / a colony of vultures waiting for its tribute” (lines 16–18).

The sexual assault that happens is not explicit, and that is the point, for readers to not really look at the scene, but to let the images focus in on the surroundings: the heat, sweat, and creosote bush ornamented with an undergarment, the vultures circling above similar to gods willing to do nothing.

David knew what the poem was trying to say, but he started talking to me about narcos and asked, as though I were on trial, what I thought about these cartels. He wanted to know if I knew that some cartels began in order to provide for their families, and that even some leaders, such as El Chapo, actually did good for the community: buying gifts for villages, paying for everyone’s meal at a restaurant, and exposing the corruption of the government on every level. I said the world was complex, and he nodded and said reluctantly that narcos sometimes did some questionable things, too.

David was part of a group of about a dozen boys in our first graduating class who did not see themselves in college, even though the idea of attending

college was instilled since middle school. (Our school district advocated and expected that every graduating senior would go to college; it was nonnegotiable, a feat that they could advertise on billboards, commercials, yearly recaps about our successes across Texas.)

Our students bonded over cars and corridos as they worked at construction sites on the weekends with an uncle or a family friend, because at the end of the shift, they witnessed that they had accomplished something in the immediate term. In a few months’ time, the concrete they poured would become a plaza, apartments, a new building to house offices for a city that, for all they knew, would grow forever. Additionally, the thought of one day having their own crew and being contracted with companies that would give them reliable and steady work remained enticing and within their grasp. Some Monday mornings during his junior year, I would see David’s face and neck sunburnt red, and to make small talk before classes started, I would ask how his weekend was.

“Good,” he’d say. “Worked.”

And I knew he meant he had picked up a job somewhere in our ever-expanding and entrepreneur-driven Austin.

Nevertheless, I gathered from conversations with teachers and counselors that David said he wanted to graduate and learn a trade: auto repair, electrical, or plumbing if that was where the money was. I knew he was not going to go on and study literature. (I was aware that none of my students would.) But for most of his senior year, David kept asking for more poems, and I kept feeding him Javier Zamora and Erika L. Sánchez, as well as more poets I read: Juan Felipe Herrera, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Natalie Diaz, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others who were not in the poetry packet I had assembled.

David completed a SOAPStone analysis for each poem he studied through close reading, turned it in before the end of the week, and sometimes during lunch, he would return to my classroom to complete extra assignments to make up for not reading the Atwood novel. Additionally, we discussed what was occurring throughout each poem and the places where there was imagery, repetition, metaphors, where every literary device enhanced the intended effect of the speaker’s voice, as well as the author’s intentions.

David did not understand every poem we read or connect with each one. (For instance, the poems by Tom Sleigh or W. S. Di Piero were not as relatable.) However, he tried to, and trying is sometimes more important than “getting.” As the year progressed and we ventured beyond Zamora and Sánchez, David began to analyze poems that he would not have at the beginning of the year, and I remember how in class and during lunch, we were able to dissect “A Man’s World” by Tracy K. Smith. He might not have had all the descriptions of figurative language in his toolbox, but he knew what he wanted to convey.

Together, we broke Smith’s poem down where it mattered most in our reading lives. We looked at the meaning behind the title, the sexual undertones that seeped through a line such as “dangle between you like a locket on a chain” (line 2). We examined this extended metaphor and studied the shift in tone that revealed the way in which certain men will lie to get what they desire: women, money, power. Overall, David understood the tone’s purpose, and he felt confident that he could replicate his analysis with other poems of this nature.

Although David resisted reading, challenged teachers on assignments, and showed opposition to rigid instruction, he wanted to learn deeply and understand. Indeed, I am aware of the pedagogical theories and methods about improving the rigor of an ELA classroom, but connecting with a student—not seeing them as merely a grade, a number, or someone who has a reputation that automatically puts adults on the defensive or enables deficit-based stereotypes or thinking—was something I had to experience, rather than read in a handout at professional development meetings. Unknown to David, he made me much more aware and confident that I need not teach everyone exactly the same, that I can individualize my teaching and still have it mean something beyond the classroom.

WANDERER

The car behind me was eager to get home. So was I. I accelerated, leaving behind the AutoZone parking lot and the men and cars it hosted, and I couldn’t help but remember David’s mother at a parent meeting a few years earlier. Our school held monthly

parent meetings with seniors to discuss upcoming exams, field trips on the calendar, and expectations for college applications.

And there was David’s mother, ambling toward the cafeteria tables, clutching her purse in her hands as though it held something more than ChapStick, cash, receipts. She sat down, moved the hair from her temples to the back of her ears, and I watched as she told David something that he nodded to. They looked nothing alike, but she was his mother and she cared, and her lack of a second job let her show up to a 6 p.m. meeting on a Tuesday.

From what I knew about our families, a lot of parents were undocumented, and the more I thought about David’s mother that evening, the more I wondered if she’d had to cross into this country with the heat as her accomplice, and if some part of her, after all these years, was still in that limbo between worlds, running, hiding, hoping that there’d be no tribute to pay before she reached this side.

When students leave our classroom at the end of the year, there is no telling where exactly they will end up. Some of my students are still in college, a few years away from graduating. Some dropped out of higher education after a few semesters, certain that this was not the path they wanted in life. For all I know, David is still in hiding, but for the time I was his teacher, he was not just a student, but a person learning about the world and his role in it.

No one takes the easy way out of ELA class by directing their energy and focus on poetry. David did and, as all students do at some point during their educational journey, he needed to know that I was on his side. I was going to be there for him to pick up the nuances of tone, or decipher figurative language, or talk about how a speaker shared similar life experiences with him. Perhaps if David had had a few more people on his side, his trajectory would have steered him away from a life of violence.

David began to analyze poems that he would not have at the beginning of the year. He might not have had all the descriptions of figurative language in his toolbox, but he knew what he wanted to convey.

There are days (sometimes even weeks) when we, as teachers, might feel that we should be making a greater impact at a faster pace. But we matter so significantly to these young minds, and whether we make a difference in one student's life or a thousand, we should always remember that when we turn our classroom lights off and head home for the day, we have let someone see the world the way it can be and not merely the way it is now. 📖

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

In this strategy guide, you'll learn how to model how students can make three different kinds of connections (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world). Students then use this knowledge to find their own personal connections to a text. <http://bit.ly/36QYgC3>

Scrubbed of My Own History, a found poem

(lines from *Rethinking Bilingual Education: Welcoming Home Languages in Our Classrooms*, edited by Elizabeth Barbian, Grace Cornell Gonzales, and Pilar Mejía, *Rethinking Schools*, 2017)

the problem with stereotypes:
 they are untrue,
 incomplete, they
 become the only story
 stunting the flourishing
 stunting indigenous beauty
 my tongue wild / inappropriate / primitive
 a casualty of war
 an impossibility

—RENÉ SALDAÑA JR.

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RENÉ SALDAÑA JR. teaches in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas Tech University. He is the author of several books for children and young adults. René's upcoming books include *Eventually*, *Inevitably: My Writing Life in Verse*, a *Memoir* and *Strangers in Our Own Land: A Poetic Autobiography*. He can be reached at rene.saldana@ttu.edu.

CHARLES D. CARPENTER

Rediscovering Rainy Mountain: A Brief Journey to the Oklahoma Plains

An educator presents a travelogue with reflections on teaching Indigenous peoples' literature after traveling to Rainy Mountain in southwestern Oklahoma.

*What moves?
What moves on this archaic force
Was wild and walling at the source.*

—N. SCOTT MOMADAY,
THE WAY TO RAINY MOUNTAIN

Back in 2014, as a somewhat apprehensive second-year teacher, I wanted to prove to a pair of well-established veteran colleagues assigned to this same literature course that I could not only offer legitimate contributions which would enhance our curriculum, but also invigorate what students might perceive as a potentially dull introduction to the school year. After all, nothing invites students to gravitate toward literature like immediately jumping into the rigid, sometimes inflexible writings of our seventeenth-century, Puritan literary predecessors. I skimmed through the egregiously thin introductory unit which preceded the literature of the early colonists. There wasn't much to work with. A pause, then finally the suggestion of starting with literature of Indigenous peoples arose.

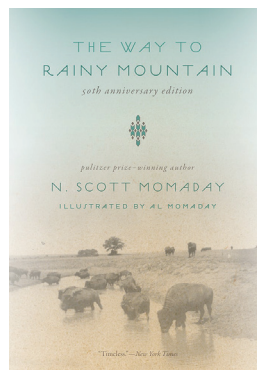
From a curricular standpoint, the idea, I believed, had merit. The course employed the subtitle "American Literature," and who could be more American than the original inhabitants of the country? Furthermore, given our school's proximity to northeastern Oklahoma, with names such as Wyandotte, Eastern Shawnee, Seneca-Cayuga, and Quapaw

already part of the students' collective lexicon (not to mention more than a few students being able to claim Native American ancestry themselves), a sense of increased student buy-in would ideally arise. If we wanted to retain the chronological, units-based order of the course, this proposition would achieve such a goal and avoid any mass restructuring of the curriculum so close to the start of the school year.

A productive debate ensued concerning pacing, how we might approach certain literary tropes, what anchor texts would comprise the unit, and what a possible assessment might look like, and then a sudden, sharp realization struck me: *I haven't read a single one of these texts. Not only that, but I, as someone who is not Native American, will have real difficulty trying to display competence (or confidence) enough to adequately teach these texts.*

In essence, I felt what was perhaps a relatable mix of impostor syndrome, trepidation, and a terrifying lack of ethos to be able to give these culturally rich, tremendously important stories their well-deserved due diligence. In the end, I eventually stumbled through the unit as any new teacher might, but after it was concluded, I made a personal commitment that if I were ever to teach this class again in the future, I would take steps to at least enhance my own cultural competence in order to do a better job. Enter the notion of *moving* underpinned by the concept of a *journey*.

In this article, I contend that high school English language arts (ELA)



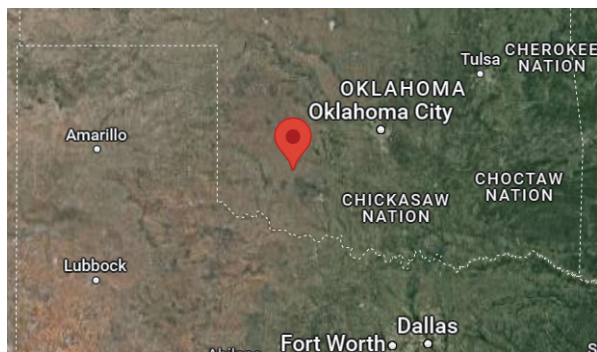


FIGURE 1
This map of Oklahoma shows the location of Rainy Mountain.

teachers who wish to give literature of Indigenous peoples the full breadth and depth it deserves must themselves “move,” and can—as a result of engaging with any number of cultural or educational events, geography, community gatherings, or other firsthand experiences—enhance their own efficacy and confidence when teaching these vitally important texts in their own classrooms. Simultaneously, I share personal experiences from a short trip which took me to the plains of southwestern Oklahoma (see Figure 1) as a means of embracing N. Scott Momaday’s conceptualization of what a “journey” truly means.

GETTING THERE

South US 183 near Clinton, Oklahoma, is a juxtaposition of the archaic and contemporary. While John Deere combines with headers the size of half

a football field engulf golden-brown wheat fields with a voracious appetite, on the horizon further south, the jutting, mound-like slopes of the Wichita Mountains blend the highway with the sky in a scene that is—obvious differences aside—probably not too different from when the Kiowa first witnessed it themselves. On this particular day in June 2021, the aesthetic of a cloudless, piercing-blue sky belied the fact that it was

The jutting, mound-like slopes of the Wichita Mountains blend the highway with the sky in a scene that is—obvious differences aside—probably not too different from when the Kiowa first witnessed it themselves.

conspiring with the afternoon heat to reflect a wavy mirage of haze at regular intervals on the highway. The abundance of greenery had noticeably faded awhile back on Interstate 40, somewhere west of Yukon, into a drier, grittier geography marked by semiarid shrubbery, fewer towering oak trees, and a looming consciousness that one was starting a transition from the midwestern landscape into the desert one. In short, the sapling-laden mile markers of the Ozarks were long in the rearview mirror.

Four lanes of the highway ultimately coalesced into two south of Clinton as towns with names like Babbs, Rocky, and Hobart greeted me, along with the occasional gas station or Dollar General and a few town blocks dotted with century-old brick buildings which demanded my slowing down to 35 miles per hour. Despite the fact that I knew I was a short yet noticeable distance away from where I had marked my end destination in *Google Maps*, I nonetheless remained vigilant for a “single knoll [rising] out of the plain” as a dust cloud generated by a synchronized dance of John Deere harvesters continued to blur the horizon view en route to where I planned on spending the next couple of days (Momaday 3).

AN HONEST REFLECTION

Stumbling through the introductory unit on literature of Indigenous peoples some years prior had initiated a desire not to repeat the somewhat lackluster performance I gave during my second year of teaching. Rather than having ample time as a relatively new teacher to think deeply about the scope and role of the reading selections, where they fit in the greater cultural context of literature as a whole, and what specific skills I wanted to teach through the incorporation of this unit, I scratched the surface just enough to skate by. The mix of being a novice while concurrently lacking a more thorough understanding of these readings proved to be a recipe for mediocrity.

Nonetheless, I was determined to make the unit more enriching than last time. Now prepped with a few more years of experience, as well as thinking about the notions in N. Scott Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain* concerning the theme of *moving* and

the core constructs of a *journey*, I ultimately wanted to enhance my own understanding of the literature rather than simply rehashing what the textbook's introduction asserted. I felt I was now more prepared to combat the aforementioned lack of ethos stemming from my own relative inexperience concerning the literary traditions of Native peoples and cultures.

Failing to fully give Indigenous texts a proper place is an issue which has plagued ELA curriculum at both the secondary and postsecondary levels for at least the past few decades. As Kenneth Roemer asserts, "In reality, most high school and college teachers only have a limited time to discuss [Native Americans], possibly as part of a 'minorities' section in an introduction to American literature" (619). Further compounding the issue, a range of imprecisions when representing Native cultures in writing—such as inaccuracies of portrayal and inadvertent reinforcement of stereotypes—often create troublesome barriers when attempting to include these texts in the curriculum ("Native American Literature in Your Classroom"). The question, in part, now became how best to navigate around those potential pitfalls since, naturally, the last thing anyone wants to do is offend any group in a classroom full of students.

The issue further became how to address an inherent lack of ethos which emanated from three sources probably not too unfamiliar to many other teachers: I am not Native American, I hadn't experienced previous substantial undergraduate coursework in Native American or Indigenous peoples' literature, and at the time, I hadn't personally traveled to nor engaged with sites of literary and historical significance concerning the texts I'd be teaching. Therefore, I had little authority to speak on the geographic features or spatial references within several of the texts—two critical literary components of several Native peoples' readings contained in our 11th-grade anthology. While I couldn't change two of those three factors, I could indeed modify one of them. Thus, after a much improved second go-around with this unit later in my career, I decided at least a few days of my summer would be devoted to traveling in person to Rainy Mountain—the eponymous landscape feature of Momaday's critically acclaimed text.

To that end, I set out with the goal of returning with firsthand knowledge of a text I would be teaching and enhanced credibility to teach it, as well as at least a fragment of understanding of exactly why this location held so much importance for the author. Granted, although simply traveling to a geographic site of literary significance and writing about the experience would hardly give me expert status, the mere act of undertaking the journey with goodwill and an open mind toward increasing one's own personal competence seems supported by the broader educational discourse facilitated in part by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. Their publication *Americans: A Dialogue Toolkit for Educators* employs the strategy of "dialogue arcs" (a concept developed by Tammy Bormann and David Camp) to generate conversation revolving around a shared experience, moving from (1) "community building" to (2) "sharing diversity of experiences" to (3) "exploring perspectives beyond our own experiences" to (4) "synthesizing and bringing closure" (4). However, perhaps most reassuring, the publication affirms "that knowledge can be drawn from both personal experience and formal study" (*Americans: A Dialogue Toolkit for Educators* 4). Accordingly, when I returned, I hoped to have a more firmly established personal experience upon which some sense of a shared classroom experience centered in literary dialogue might be built.

ARRIVING AT THE SITE

When I arrived at my state park campsite in Mountain Park, Oklahoma, in early June 2021, if I had any doubt that this was indeed summer in the plains, the words of Momaday's description comparing "the prairie" to "an anvil's edge" reverberated each time my arm bumped against any metallic surface (Momaday 1). I unpacked my tent, chair, and backpack. The dashboard thermometer on my truck indicated 97 degrees at 4:00 in the afternoon; the stifling, furnace-like air proved it.

I looked around, noting that the state park itself was carved into a wide, flat swath of the southern Oklahoma plains nestled within a gap of red dirt in the Wichita Mountains, which is about as stark

a contrast to the ancestral home of the Kiowa in western Montana as one can imagine. (See Figure 2.)

Although I might never fully comprehend the cultural significance and influence of this region myself, I could begin to recognize its importance at least in terms of a written work.

These oppositional geographic settings, as Kenneth Lincoln argues, occasionally cause students to struggle in comprehending the structure of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* due to its frequent shifting of settings and its “cross-disciplinary, multidimensional, and inter-cultural” nature—though in practice, it’s sometimes hard for students to simply know where events are taking place and who’s involved (95). I

hoped now, by enhancing the next go-around at teaching this unit (and this text, specifically) through

augmented personal experience and, thus, credibility to navigate the spatial nuances of both the text and terrain, I could address at least one of my own instructional inadequacies.

Following a plain meal of canned pork and beans, I navigated my lawn chair into a precious piece of campsite real estate, an area with shade, before the overall quiet of the early evening brought about another powerful realization: that I was quite possibly only a short drive from the area where Momaday recalls his grandmother participating in the Kiowa’s final Sun Dance in 1887, an area he pinpoints as somewhere “on the Washita River above Rainy Mountain Creek” (Momaday 8). This tract of southern Oklahoma must present an astonishing sense of ambivalence for the Kiowa people, and yet still here in the twenty-first century, it exists at the intersection of so many significant points in Momaday’s work. Once again, the importance of geography as it helps to propel a narrative could not have been more noteworthy.

Although I might never fully comprehend the cultural significance and influence of this region myself, I could begin to recognize its importance at least in terms of a written work, with the intent to convey that significance to students in the future. Momaday’s narrative seems to corroborate this perception when he writes in the prologue: “[T]he journey is an evocation of three things in particular: a landscape that is incomparable, a time that is gone forever, and the human spirit, which endures” (2). Having not quite reached the pinnacle of the summer solstice yet, the sun slipped behind a large, rocky hill adjacent to my tent just after 9 p.m., whereupon a pleasant surprise in the form of a slight, almost cool, breeze redirected my attention upward to the view of the clear, radiant sky—a wistful scene which reinforced that this was indeed an “incomparable landscape.”

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

Making efforts to increase professional efficacy through engagement with the literary and historical culture of Indigenous peoples remains critically important for high school ELA teachers, given that out of the 3.5 million public school teachers in the country, only 0.5 percent are Native or Alaskan American



FIGURE 2
A sign on South US Highway 183 announces the Indigenous community off of the roadway.

(Domzalski). With such an underrepresented teacher population in preK–12 schools, it stands to reason that any honest endeavor which promotes increased learning or understanding pertaining to Native American and other Indigenous peoples' literary traditions in order to more thoroughly and respectfully promote those values in the classroom should be widely encouraged, which is an idea embraced by Dakota Burrow, a second-year high school ELA teacher and Seneca-Cayuga Nation member.

I asked Burrow to reflect upon his own high school experience concerning the inclusion of Native peoples' texts in the curriculum. He noted that in his own coursework, about "one week was spent on two texts" (Burrow). Moreover, he highlighted a common pitfall for educators who do make well-intentioned efforts to embed Indigenous peoples' literature into the ELA curriculum: the inadvertent coalescing of distinct cultures into one collective experience. Burrow asserted that "teachers would sometimes 'clump together' tribes into one group by saying 'all this' or 'all that' when in reality, each tribe brings different perspectives and has their own unique stories." Unfortunately, this phenomenon arises commonly enough that other sources caution against it as well ("Native American Literature in Your Classroom").

Put together, these points further emphasize the need for ELA teachers to make conscious efforts to increase their own efficacy by getting out and engaging with historical sites, events, or community gatherings, thus building the aforementioned sense of personal experience and enhanced cultural competence, which can then help establish the foundation of shared experiences around these stories. Burrow concurred, noting that "more learning can only be a good thing" and that "it keeps any good from getting done if we refrain from learning more about Indigenous histories."

For teachers seeking to find ways of embedding a variety of Indigenous peoples' texts into their own curriculum, I found the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian website to be of tremendous value. Despite the fact that their "Worksheet for Selecting Native American Children's Literature" is obviously geared toward elementary grades, the criteria themselves should prompt thoughtful

consideration at all levels. Compelling educators to consider factors such as "authority," "accurate representation," "tribal specificity," "language," and "contemporary life," the rubric allows for a careful analysis of a text's features to enable an informed decision about its selection. Furthermore, by centering the educational activities on the idea that "there is no single American Indian culture," the website prompts educators to not only consider voices of multiple Indigenous peoples, but also offer instructional ideas in a cross-disciplinary fashion (*Native Knowledge 360° Essential Understandings: A Guide to Disciplinary Connections and Classroom Applications*).

The aforementioned criteria and guide could also be used in an inverse fashion, spurring conversations in an ELA course as to why certain Indigenous peoples' texts, genres, stories, or other literary traditions are not interpreted or portrayed authentically, as well as the literary, cultural, and historical implications of failing to do so. In subsequent years of teaching courses which have included any number of Native peoples' genres, I have often started the unit with a five-minute timed journal entry asking students to describe the first depictions of Native peoples' stories they've either read or seen.

Students will frequently gravitate toward old Western movies of the middle part of the twentieth century or possibly even Disney films. A follow-up question about Hollywood's various portrayals and how they have influenced students' perceptions typically provides the next segment of the conversation arc. I've often wrapped up the discussion by asking, "What do you think has changed today?" The "Dialogue Toolkit for Educators" supports this approach throughout various phases of the dialogue arcs strategy. It also includes additional prompting questions to promote further discussion or journaling as a means of ending the exercise with a "sense of community" ("Native American Literature in Your Classroom").

As a result of this initial discussion and journal activity, we are often able to address points including whose voice gets to tell the story, what happens when non-Native actors attempt to portray Native characters, and even how these portrayals have ingrained themselves over time. From there, we can make the

transition into the other stages of the dialogue arcs structure via the personal experiences of students (“Has anyone ever attended or been to . . . ?” often cultivates responses in this exercise, especially given our own geographic region). Finally, when we read the text itself, we can focus on any number of ELA standards concerning theme, structure, imagery, or organization. The possibilities really are endless given the wide variety of genres across the literary traditions of numerous Indigenous cultures—including nonfiction texts, poetry, songs, and memoir. Burrow also offered a helpful reminder that other skills (including empathy) and even the discussion of Indigenous peoples’ rights can serve as additional avenues for analysis.

The websites of individual Native communities and nations often have specific sections devoted to educational interests, which offer teachers an additional possibility for exploration. After attending the Eastern Shawnee Nation’s annual powwow in September 2022 simply as an observer, I focused attention on the “Resilience through Adversity: A Companion Guide for Educators and Researchers” page of their website to learn more about possible resources. Filled with companion lessons, approaches, and ideas, this site yields an array of primary source documents, photos, and theme-based ideas which can easily transition into not only ELA classrooms, but other subjects, too.

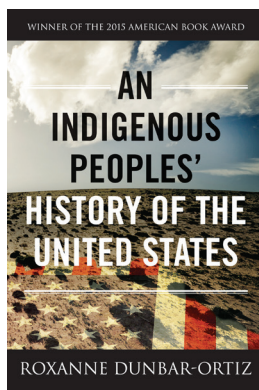
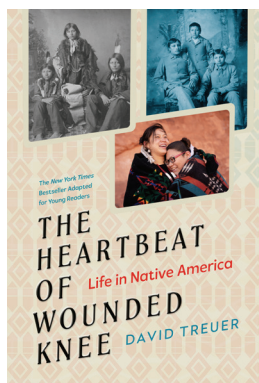
For teachers seeking other texts and authors with the aim of further extending classroom discussion and reading, the book *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz compels readers to recalibrate traditional historical approaches as she argues that “a new periodization of US history is needed that traces the Indigenous experience” (xii). Embracing the idea of a “journey” himself, David Treuer, in *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Life in Native America*, prepares the reader for the “untold story of the past 130 years” since the Wounded Knee Massacre as he seeks to promote the “conviction” that “our Indian cultures

are not dead and our civilizations have not been destroyed” (9–10). Each of these texts undoubtedly offers both students and educators enriching new perspectives regarding Indigenous histories to carry on the conversation outside the classroom.

THE WAY TO RAINY MOUNTAIN (AND BACK)

Back in Oklahoma, I rose early the next morning with the hope of catching the sunrise over Rainy Mountain itself. Paired with a night where sleep came at a premium, the already sweltering morning heat hastened my pace at packing up my campsite. Double-checking to ensure all of my gear was firmly entrenched in the bed of my truck, I set off roughly half an hour behind schedule. About 20 minutes into the trip, I stopped for a cup of coffee at a small convenience store in Roosevelt, Oklahoma, that was strikingly reminiscent of what one might find during the presidency of the town’s namesake. Time seemed to move slower in this corner of the state, marked by the aforementioned juxtaposition of the archaic and contemporary, but also the geographic ambivalence manifesting itself as part Midwest, part Old West, part desert, and part Great Plains. Daylight, meanwhile, continued its consistent march forward, thereby dashing any hope of catching the sunrise over Rainy Mountain itself, yet nevertheless, I was so close to reaching the last stop of this brief journey.

At roughly 8:00 that morning, I finally caught sight of the famous landmark itself after a brief navigation through two inconspicuously labeled county roads which allowed me to approach the mountain from the north. Amid the gently sloping hills in the area, Rainy Mountain loomed larger, more dominating than the rest, but perhaps its most noticeable feature was the lush greenery standing out in complete opposition to the desert-like shrubbery found nearly everywhere else in this area. A phalanx of deep green trees surrounded the blacktop road



as I drove nearer, and even the prairie grass absorbed a slight chartreuse hue, aided by the water provided by a nearby creek and not yet having undergone the brutality of the late summer months.


I pulled my truck off to the side of an adjacent county road, then shut it off completely as I looked upward at the mountain, which stood about a mile away. It didn't have the sharp point of, say, a mountain in the Rockies, but rather a quiet, sloping, dignified presence well-suited for the geography surrounding it. No sound reminiscent of anything modern emanated from anywhere. A few birds departing the nearby hedge trees, cackling in unison, conveyed the only audible noise in the area. Outside of the fencing and electric poles, it would not be difficult to imagine viewing this scene as the Kiowa did centuries earlier, replete with tranquil stillness and the sounds of nature in the background (see Figure 3). I absorbed the overall quietness of the scene for a few moments



FIGURE 3
The scenery in southwestern Oklahoma stands out for travelers.

as I contemplated what that mountain must have witnessed over the years.

With the sun now fully risen, the warmth of the day began to spark a light, dry breeze from the southeast, which stirred the grass leading up the mountain, almost as if it were waving goodbye at me. At that juncture, I realized that while I might not completely grasp the importance of this famous geographic landmark from a cultural perspective after only being in its presence for a relatively short period of time, I began to more fully comprehend Momaday's interest in it as a focal point for his work.

I jotted down some general descriptions of the surrounding geography, thought ahead to how I might better approach this text in the subsequent school year, and then started my truck and began the six-hour journey back home, ready to lend some new perspective and, hopefully, do a better job with this ever-significant unit the next go-around. 

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

Students write a three-voice narrative based on the structure of N. Scott Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. They first analyze a passage from the book, focusing on the three-voice narrative style Momaday uses. They use a Venn diagram to make connections between the three voices. Students read folktales and myths, discussing their themes and characteristics. They then select a tale and retell it in their own words as the first voice in their narrative. Next they interview an elder and write about the interview as the second voice—that of a historian. Students then compose a personal response to the interview or tale, adding the third voice in their narrative. They use a Venn diagram to peer-review another student’s work, looking for connections between the three voices. Finally, they revise their work based on the feedback they receive. <https://bit.ly/3wIAipp>

CANDIDATES ANNOUNCED FOR SECTION ELECTIONS, WATCH FOR YOUR BALLOT

The Secondary Section Nominating Committee has named the following candidates for Section offices in the NCTE spring elections:

For Members of the Secondary Section Steering Committee (two to be elected): **Joel Garza**, Greenhill School, Addison TX; **Christian Hines**, The Ohio State University; **Monica Baldonado-Ruiz**, San Diego State University, California; and **Christina Porter**, Revere Public Schools.

For Members of the Secondary Section Nominating Committee (three to be elected): **Kate Hertz**, Geneva HS, Geneva, IL; **Mary Richards**, ASD Anchorage School District; **Michael Cook**, Auburn University; **Barrett Rosser**, University of Pennsylvania; **Melissa Alter Smith**, high school English teacher, Ohio; and TBD.

Members of the 2022–23 Secondary Section Nominating Committee are Anthony Celaya, Southeast Missouri State University; Summer Melody Pennell, The University of Vermont; and Janelle Quintans Bence.

Lists of candidates for all of the ballots can be found on the NCTE website at <https://ncte.org/get-involved/volunteer/elections/>.

Excavating Erased Histories as Culturally Sustaining Instruction

The authors present a unit on the erased histories of nondominant identities as a form of culturally sustaining instruction.

I'm sick and tired of the fact that we the students don't have a say on what should be taught in school, for example all of the topics that history has erased . . . all of these topics have a lot in common, which is the fact that people have had to deal with prejudice, racism, and judging of sexuality. Our schools barely teach us about these types of topics which is unfair. We deserve to have a voice in topics we need and want to learn more about in school. We deserve more knowledge of our backgrounds.

—MARISA* AGE 15

The creation of this unit began as many do: while we were daydreaming in a professional development session. In January 2019, as the ninth-grade English language arts (ELA) teachers at our high school, we struggled with a pressing dilemma.

Our high-stakes, standardized test, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), was a few months away and our administrators wanted to know our plan for preparing students to pass. Test scores were a major factor in evaluating the progress and success of school, teacher, and student performance, so we faced immense pressure to do well. School district leaders and administrators stressed aligning our lessons with high-leverage tested standards, asked us often to present test-related data from our students, and offered district guidance on ways to teach tested standards and content.

*All students' names are pseudonyms.

The previous year, we had followed this advice and implemented a unit of test preparation in which students spent six weeks reading passages and answering multiple-choice questions from released tests, playing games with key exam vocabulary terms, and completing fun activities designed to rehearse low-scoring skills. However, by the end of the unit we were disappointed, because we noticed this type of review had students practice the skills on a superficial level, visibly disconnected from real-life contexts that mattered to them.

As educators committed to teaching for equity and justice, we aspired to center pedagogies that “support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris 95). Similar to Ivelisse Ramos Brannon, we believed “culturally responsive teaching and learning are necessary for all students and all teachers” (18), and we wanted our students, as Josh Thompson advocates, to learn “critical reading, writing, and thinking skills *along with* skills in naming, examining, and disrupting systems of oppression” (85, emphasis added).

These competing motivations left us wondering how ELA teachers can create curriculum and instruction that respond to students' unique identities within an educational context that values standards and standardized testing. How could we build a unit that was culturally sustaining for our students while also preparing them to succeed on the test?

As we sat contemplating this in the professional development session, the facilitator asked us to think of a real-life problem extending past the walls of our school that our students could grapple with. The majority of our students identified as either Black or Latinx, 74 percent were economically disadvantaged, and 34 percent were multilingual learners. We puzzled over what issue would feel relevant to them, what would engage and challenge them in authentic, meaningful ways.

Zander thought of a Tweet he had seen from a principal who asked a group of her Black students what they wanted to learn in school. Their response: a desire to learn more about their history and culture

Our approach provided a comprehensive informational texts unit that was meaningful to our students' identities, a way to merge academic skills with cultural literacy.

besides the typical lessons on slavery and Martin Luther King Jr. This made Alex think about how most history lessons she had seen for marginalized communities were only centered on the “greats.” As a Black woman, Alex recognized the importance of learning deeply about your history because it wasn't until after

her K–12 education that she had really learned about Black historical figures and their significant contributions to society. Zander related as a queer person who had never seen nor heard queer narratives or histories until he began university classes.

The spark was lit. Reading, talking, and writing about these erased histories—the nondominant people, events, and ideas not prevalent in the approved social studies curriculum—would fit our students' needs perfectly. We examined testing data from years prior and noticed that students didn't perform as well on the expository reading and writing sections of the exam. Our approach provided a comprehensive informational texts unit that was meaningful to our students' identities, a way to merge academic skills with cultural literacy.

In this article, we describe the creation of our Erased Histories unit. We discuss the tools—the texts, the pedagogical structures, and the activities—we devised to help students uncover events,

people, and ideas traditionally buried by dominant narratives. By presenting the design and implementation, our goal is to provide an example of how teachers can navigate the tension of creating social-justice-oriented, culturally sustaining pedagogies within the constraints of the assessment-driven, standards-based system in which many of us function. We believe the results of this unit show how excavating erased histories can be an emotionally and academically engaging way to implement culturally sustaining instruction.

THE ERASED HISTORIES UNIT

I always wanted to know more about my history since I never really learned about it during school.

—EILEEN, AGE 14

Following our professional development session, we spent several months planning together until we had formulated a unit overview (see Table 1).

After a unit launch that introduced students to key vocabulary and pulled them in emotionally, students would engage in three cycles—one for Latinx histories, one for Black histories, and one for women's and LGBTQ+ histories—where they would practice reading and writing skills while uncovering topics and events they might never have learned about in school (see Figure 1).

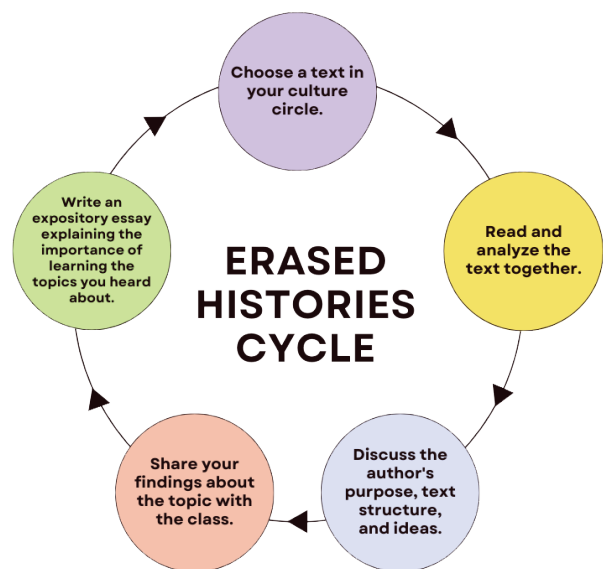


FIGURE 1 Students went through each step of the Erased Histories Cycle three times throughout the unit.

TABLE 1
An Overview of the Erased Histories Unit

	Theme	Topics	Sample Texts
Days 1-3	Unit launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key social justice vocabulary • Intersectionality • Dominant versus marginalized groups • What are erased histories? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What Is Intersectionality?” (Teaching Tolerance)
Days 4-6	Latinx histories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The history of the word <i>Hispanic</i> • The Chicano movement • Mexican repatriation in the 1930s • The African diaspora in Mexico • La Matanza in Texas • Atrocities inflicted on the Taíno people by Christopher Columbus • Mayan technological achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Time a President Deported 1 Million Mexican Americans for Supposedly Stealing US Jobs” (Bernard) • “The Problematic History of the Word ‘Hispanic’” (Cruz) • “State Historical Marker for ‘La Matanza 1915’ to Be Unveiled” (Martinez)
Days 7-9	Black histories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jim Crow laws • <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> • W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington • Tulsa Black Wall Street massacre • Marcus Garvey • Phillis Wheatley • Dred Scott decision • Harlem Renaissance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Devastation of Black Wall Street” (Fain) • “Marcus Garvey” (<i>History.com</i>) • “Phillis Wheatley” (<i>Poetry Foundation</i>)
Days 10-12	Women’s and LGBTQ+ histories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvey Milk • Stonewall riots • History of gender fluidity • Heteronormativity • Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Seneca Falls Convention • Barbara C. Jordan • History of LGBTQ+ rights • Sexual harassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Barbara C. Jordan” (<i>History.com</i>) • “Stonewall Riots” (<i>History.com</i>) • “It’s Not in Your Head: The History and Science of Gender Fluidity” (McGuire)
Days 13-14	Summative assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer the expository prompt: Write an essay explaining the importance of learning erased histories. 	

These themes and topics were chosen to be included in the fourteen, 90-minute-block days designated for the unit.

To prepare for the unit, our first step was to find texts. We reached out to our personal and professional learning networks on social media, scoured the internet, and even enlisted the help of Alex’s younger sister, who was taking classes in Africana studies in college, to create a list of topics and articles fitting

our criteria: people, events, and ideas that shaped history but were not taught or covered in depth in our school’s United States history textbook.

For student discussion and processing around difficult topics of privilege and oppression, we turned to Freirean-style culture circles, inspired by Mariana

Souto-Manning's book *Freire, Teaching, and Learning: Culture Circles across Contexts*. In culture circles, participants pose a problem based on their lived experiences, then use their diversity of perspectives and backgrounds to engage in critical dialogue and collective problem solving until they develop a course of action. We created culture circles as groups of four students assigned in a deliberate way to represent a diversity of perspectives, backgrounds, and reading levels. Though we may have structured and guided this process more than in other contexts, we believed it was a consistent pedagogical structure for students not just to collaborate in decoding and analyzing the texts, but to collectively process what came up for them in their reading and to think about how to turn those feelings into actions.

Finally, after each cycle, students would write an expository essay. We wanted them to practice before turning in a summative essay that synthesized their takeaways over the course of the unit, an essay that asked them to explain the importance of learning about marginalized communities in schools. Though the state expectations of what informational writing should look like on the standardized test did limit our possibilities, we tried to make it feel more authentic by giving students an audience and purpose grounded in real-life contexts. We told them to imagine they were a consultant team hired by the district to evaluate the social studies curriculum and their essay was a report explaining why more non-dominant histories should be taught in schools.

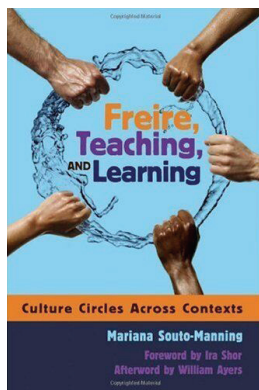
STUDENTS AS TEXTUAL EXCAVATORS

We should all be informed about these topics. We should all come together and tell teachers/adults that we want to learn about these topics.

—FRANCISCO, AGE 15

These events are as important to know like the well-known historical events that are taught till this day. Any painful, devastating, and brutal event should be taught to teach others how events can change the present. By helping to shape the world to do better.

—YESENIA, AGE 15



As a class, we began the unit by discussing dominant and marginalized groups in our country. We established some marginalized groups represented in our school, specifically drawing attention to people who identify as Latinx, Black, women, or LGBTQ+. Then, we asked students: in the ten years most of them had been in school, what had they learned about the histories of these groups?

They called out names like César Chávez, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks before falling silent. Teacher wait time extended into an uncomfortable hush as the realization dawned on students' faces. To emphasize the point, we added, "Isn't it crazy that in all those years of classes, you learned so little about the histories of the people in this room and in this school? During this unit, our hope is to change that. In the next six weeks, we are going to learn about some of the histories missing from our school's textbooks."

The looks on their faces were the complete opposite of what we had come to expect in mid-February. We chose to launch the unit this way to get students thinking critically about what they learn in school and why, because school curricula can sometimes feel like an immovable norm, rather than a social construction. We also wanted to activate students' emotions. For some, this was experienced viscerally: we saw their faces flush, heard their voices rising, as the injustice of being denied learning about their own histories sank in. We tapped into adolescents' strong sense of justice, creating a meaningful investment in what they would do for the rest of the unit.

CHOOSING A TEXT

At the beginning of each cycle, we asked students to meet in their culture circles. We presented them with the different text options, and their group worked together to choose what text they wanted to read.

As one culture circle determined what topic to read about for the Latinx histories cycle, Devon grabbed an article about the repatriation of Mexican Americans in the 1930s. "This one is about the government deporting American citizens who were

Mexican,” he told his classmates. “That sounds familiar, right?”

“What about this one? La Matanza. This happened here in Texas,” Yesenia said, as she skimmed an article. “Mexican people were targeted and killed by Texas Rangers? How come we’ve never heard of this?”

Uriel, an Afro-Latinx student from Venezuela, did not respond, not taking his eyes off an article about the African diaspora in Mexico.

Seeing students’ eyes light up as they encountered topics relevant to them, and feeling their excitement from being able to choose their own texts, filled us with hope for their future reading and engagement.

READING AND ANALYZING THE TEXT

Once each circle chose their topic, students read and analyzed the article together in their group. They were responsible for understanding the ideas of their chosen text, but also determining the author’s purpose and text structure. Reading together in culture circles provided a scaffold for resistant or struggling readers, as well as for processing the emotions and thoughts that can surface from reading about difficult topics.

Passionate conversations around the articles followed, such as in one corner of Alex’s classroom where a culture circle debated the text structure used in an article about Christopher Columbus and the Taíno people. Yolanda told her group it was a descriptive text because it described all the bad things Columbus did. “I can’t believe people think he’s a hero,” she said. “Do people even know all this stuff?”

“That’s a good question,” Alex responded. “I wonder why people don’t always learn this in history classes. Maybe that’s why articles like this one are so important. What do you think, Ahani? I see you thinking hard.”

“I thought it was a compare-and-contrast text,” Ahani said. “It’s comparing Christopher Columbus with Bartolomé de las Casas to show why one is a better role model than the other.”

“Good point,” Alex said. “I wonder if authors can combine different text structures and use them together to accomplish their purpose. Sometimes authors use a structure in one section of their text,

but there’s another one that organizes the whole piece. If you look at this article overall, how do you think the author is organizing it?”

As we listened to their discussions, we appreciated how students intertwined traditional academic ELA skills with issues of equity and justice as they considered what important takeaways to share with their peers.

SHARING TOPICS

It was important to us that students were exposed to a variety of topics, so after reading and discussing their group’s text, they presented their findings each cycle, first through a gallery walk, then jigsaw groups, and finally oral presentations. Each group shared key information from their article, including the author’s purpose, organizational text structures used, and main ideas. As students listened to their peers, they took notes in their writer’s notebooks, collecting evidence for their future essays.

This gave opportunities for students to work together to make connections between the article topics and their current real-life contexts. For example, as Ubaldo explained what he learned about Black Wall Street and the Tulsa race riots to his jigsaw group, Tatiana suggested, “That kinda reminds me of that rally in Charlottesville, the White supremacist one.”

The group continued the conversation, comparing the similarities and differences between the two events, tracing historical themes around the justice system and structural racism into the present as they discussed the lack of indictments for the killers of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement that arose in response.

“These are such important thoughts,” Alex told them. “What are some ways we can make sure people learn these things and think about these connections?”

The group members started offering solutions almost immediately: more detailed chapters in history books, articles that felt more pertinent to students, chances to connect history to current events and issues in classes.

Alex encouraged them to capture these thoughts in their writer’s notebooks for future use in their essays.

WRITING AN ESSAY

The final step for each cycle was writing an informational essay. In Zander's classroom, several students who identified as LGBTQ+ eagerly wrote essays explaining how topics such as the Stonewall riots and Harvey Milk showed how LGBTQ+ people had fought for progress.

Zander, however, watched William, who a few days earlier had told Zander that he should not have

Rather than practicing individual skills like author's purpose with a quick activity not grounded in their real life, now students were utilizing key skills in deep, collaborative ways with texts and ideas that mattered to them.

to learn about LGBTQ+ topics because he "didn't agree with all that." Zander listened carefully to his concerns and tried to explain how this unit was all about giving every perspective and background a chance to be heard. He encouraged William to listen and learn about this culture to gain valuable knowledge about his fellow community members. After some back and forth,

William somewhat sullenly returned to the room and, though he did not speak for the rest of the class, he listened to his classmates.

Later, Zander skimmed William's essay over his shoulder. Though he chose not to directly write about any LGBTQ+ topics in his essay, William wrote in his conclusion that we "should be learning about all different cultures . . . because it helps our society and teaches us more about each other."

These essays at the end of each cycle allowed us to see how students were thinking about the topics, as well as provide them with opportunities to practice applying text structures to their own writing and get formative feedback on informational writing skills.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

After going through the cycle three times, we turned to the summative assessment. This was a space for students to synthesize their learning, and because they had a first draft of an essay from each cycle, it was also a chance to practice revising and editing skills by taking ideas and structures from

their previous essays and fine-tuning them. In their essays, students answered the essential questions of the unit, giving us a glimpse of how they were processing the texts and conversations they had engaged with throughout the previous weeks.

Overall, their reflections (embedded throughout this article as epigraphs) indicated a sense of passion, a desire for justice, and sometimes even calls to action.

WE CAN DO BOTH

We deserve to learn about these erased histories in class along with everything else we already do. I think this affects people in a way because we don't learn about such a big part of history and for most of us, we don't learn about part of our identity along with the history of it.

—RUBY, AGE 14

For us, the success of this unit was in its radical difference from what it replaced. For many students, especially students from nondominant groups, preparing for standardized tests can be an experience of inflexibility and frustration, rather than affirming or opening up possibilities.

As ELA teachers, we can choose instruction that inspires emotions and passions from reading, connects texts to students' identities and real-life contexts, and opens spaces for students to explore their everyday worlds with new lenses and perspectives, rather than simply preparing for a test or mastering standards. This is what culturally sustaining pedagogies can enable.

While in the previous year students had read articles pulled from released tests they might never think about again, now they were reading about their own cultural histories and learning from each other's. Rather than practicing individual skills like author's purpose with a quick activity not grounded in their real life, now students were utilizing key skills in deep, collaborative ways with texts and ideas that mattered to them. Instead of getting a check mark if they completed all the activities for the day, students were making their voices heard about themes around equity and justice, and we could provide meaningful feedback on how to communicate those ideas.

Even without an explicit focus on the test, our classes still made significant progress in all of the informational text skill categories on the STAAR exam, especially writing informational texts, compared with their performance on the benchmark assessment. Students were engaged emotionally and intellectually in a way we had not seen in the previous year. They felt empowered to learn more deeply about the histories of the Americas and to collaboratively question what those histories show us, how they affect us today, and what we can learn from them.

Our intention in the design and implementation of this unit was to show how pressures to prepare students for success in standards-based skills or standardized tests do not require teaching to the test or teaching these skills in isolation. Teachers can create meaningful, civic-minded, culturally sustaining lessons while also helping students perform better on high-stakes tests or standards-based data. For us, this unit proved this concept is absolutely true.

Nevertheless, given the opportunity to teach this unit again, we acknowledge there are some changes we would make. We could have made after-reading activities more open-ended instead of directing students to analyze text structure specifically, thus empowering students to choose how they engaged with each text. Also, we would have liked to adhere more closely to the principles of writers workshop to make the writing process more organic and authentic. Last, we would have provided students with the opportunity to select their own article topics. We chose all the texts, but with some guidance and maybe a longer period of time, students could have successfully found readings that served the same purposes.

Overall, this unit gave students of all different backgrounds the opportunity to view school curriculum itself through a critical lens, recognizing how it can perpetuate inequities and oppression. We could have made this thread more explicit by giving students more choice and autonomy.

We know many teachers work in contexts where these types of ideas or approaches may not be welcome or even possible, but we hope that in presenting our thought process behind this unit, we have demonstrated an example of how teachers can build instruction that is responsive to their specific

students, even within restrictive systems which stress standardization. We believe teachers can do both at the same time. We can increase students' performance on standards without drilling them with practice tests or isolated skill drills. We see the Erased Histories unit as evidence of this.

We hope teachers and leaders of all kinds can recognize the value of creating culturally sustaining units, outside of data and skills. Our students got to read, write, and talk about issues and people that were relevant and actually mattered to them. They got to see their own cultures as worthy of study in the ELA classroom. **EJ**

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READWRITETHINKCONNECTION

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

Designed as a starting point to build trust and respect, as well as to encourage and support conversations that evoke emotion and change, this lesson will invite students to participate in small-group collaborative reasoning about issues of social justice and diversity. Students will read articles and answer questions that spur them to think critically about issues and discuss them with others, using evidence and experiences to support their personal beliefs. <http://bit.ly/3NhPNLe>

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: 2023 NCTE LEADERSHIP AWARDS

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The **NCTE Advancement of People of Color Leadership Award** is a special award given to an NCTE member of color who has made a significant contribution to NCTE and the development of our professional community.

The **NCTE Leadership Award for People with Disabilities** recognizes a person with a disability who has made a significant contribution to NCTE and to the development of our professional community.

The **NCTE LGBTQIA+ Advocacy and Leadership Award** recognizes a member of the LGBTQIA+ community who has made a significant contribution to NCTE and to the development of our professional community.

Submission information can be found on the NCTE leadership awards webpage at ncte.org/awards/service-awards/. **All award submissions are due May 1, 2023.**

APRIL VÁZQUEZ

Coming Home: A Reflection on the Gift of Poetry

An educator shares her discovery of poetry and some realizations about giving space to poetry in the lives of young people.

[E]veryone essentially wants the same thing as everyone else, a sense of belonging, a coming home.

—ADA LIMÓN, “FIFTEEN
BALLS OF FEATHERS”

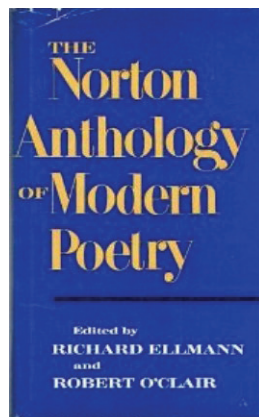
Those of us who work on the front lines with young people understand the declaration of a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children’s Hospital Association, as well as the US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy’s advisory of a “devastating” mental health crisis among adolescents (“US Surgeon General”). Suicide has become the second leading cause of death for ten- to twenty-four-year-olds (Prinstein), and emergency room visits for anxiety, mood disorders, depressive episodes, and self-harm rose sharply in the past decade (Richtel). Many adolescents feel anxious, sad, overwhelmed, angry, and hopeless. Sometimes these emotions destroy only the person who feels them; other times, they manifest outwardly. The median age for school shooters is sixteen (Jacobson).

I can connect to these young people’s experiences. At fifteen, I was an inpatient on the seventh floor of a hospital, undergoing treatment for a mental health crisis of my own stemming from my best friend’s paralysis after a stupid, avoidable

car accident. The door came open, she tried to close it, and the accident that followed left her with paraplegia until her early death. But even before Jenni’s injury, I contemplated the brave new world around me and realized what an appalling job the adults in charge were doing on everything from climate change to social justice. In short, the reasons for my depression abounded.

Nevertheless, a month before my sixteenth birthday, something happened that brought me back from the abyss. Similar to the girl in the Velvet Underground song by Lou Reed whose life was saved by rock and roll, my life was, in a very real sense, saved by poetry. I remember the day I, already a voracious reader of fiction, discovered a poetry anthology that introduced me to Allen Ginsberg, Anne Sexton, Amiri Baraka, Ted Berrigan, Sylvia Plath, and several other poets whose writing I now quote from memory. The book on the shelf of the seventh-floor schoolroom was titled *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (Ellman and O’Clair). A remarkable volume, it offered me a glimpse of something so powerful, so raw and real and beautiful, that suddenly life looked a lot more worth living.

Young people need poetry. Perhaps they don’t all need it as badly as I did, but there are connections and gains to be made from sharing poetry with even the most well-adjusted adolescent. They need to read and write it. They need



spaces where they can share it. This is especially true for young people of color, whose voices often go unheard in a system that marginalizes, overlooks,

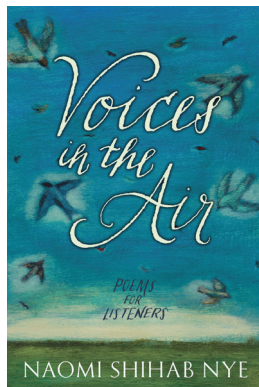
and underconsiders them. Poetry can be brought to adolescents in ways that connect to their own experiences, taking something they know and offering it back to them in electrifying language, familiar and new at the same time. As Larry Robin, founder of Moonstone Arts Center in Philadelphia, said, “That some people can take these words that all of us

use—I mean, they’re not inventing language; we all use the same words—and make you feel something, that’s magic. And poetry does that better than anything else.”

Poems bring the English language alive for young people, touching on themes at once local and universal. Isn’t this sense of connection exactly what the disengaged and deeply unhappy youth of our country need right now?

COMPLICATING THE LITERARY CANON

Our country’s diverse population demographics call for culturally relevant and sustaining instructional practices, including compelling, multicultural literature for students to explore and enjoy. Young people deserve to read the work of poets whose lived experiences resemble their own. Educators must work to ensure kids’ engagement not just with the established literary canon, but also with poets who are alive now, bending words to their will in ways never tried before. Poets who may post bite-sized ruminations on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Poets who live in the kids’ world, and who, with their words, are making life in that world a little better. Button Poetry distributes poems in innovative videos that showcase the beauty and power of diverse poets’ spoken language. The #TeachLivingPoets movement aims to bring contemporary perspectives to the classroom, to “complicate the canon” (Illich and Smith 5) with fresh voices like those of Clint Smith and Hanif Abdurraqib.



Young poets such as Siduri Beckman comment on the world around them, often pitting young people against forces of corruption, as in this excerpt of a poem that references state education budget cuts that disproportionately affect underfunded schools:

You see us as a problem
 the classic class problem
 INNER CITY streaked like mud across our
 faces
 they’re all on the street anyway.
 Thrusting fear
 into our hearts
 Why make us feel
 so small
 helpless
 Forgotten by the people
 whose duty it is to remember

 Dismiss us
 We cannot vote.
 But in this country
 we can speak.
 (Beckman, qtd. in “We Can Speak”)

Many of these young poets speak to adolescents in their own language, entering into a conversation with readers, with whom they collaboratively make meaning by sharing their lived experiences.

Collections of poetry compiled specifically for young people can make important contributions to classroom libraries and provide the basis for language arts instruction (see Table 1). The poems in these collections demystify poetry and bring the English language alive for young people, touching on themes at once local and universal. Isn’t this sense of connection exactly what the disengaged and deeply unhappy youth of our country need right now?

Many of the poems in these collections deal with the experiences of people who are often marginalized, and they do so in ways that celebrate diversity. They affirm the experiences of young people from varying backgrounds, foster connection and empathy across cultures, and empower students to share their own stories.

TABLE 1
Diverse Poetry Collections for Youth

Text	Themes
<i>Voices in the Air: Poems for Listeners</i> by Naomi Shihab Nye	Sources of inspiration, personal heroes
<i>Call Us What We Carry</i> by Amanda Gorman	History, race, the American spirit
<i>While the Earth Sleeps We Travel: Stories, Poetry, and Art from Young Refugees around the World</i> , edited by Ahmed M. Badr	Refugee experiences, displacement, hope
<i>Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability</i> , edited by Sheila Black, Jennifer Bartlett, and Michael Northen	(Dis)Ability, definitions of health and beauty
<i>Paint Me Like I Am: Teen Poems from WritersCorps</i> , edited by Bill Aguado and Richard Newirth	Friendship, race, youth experiences

The poems in these collections make poetry accessible to adolescent readers.

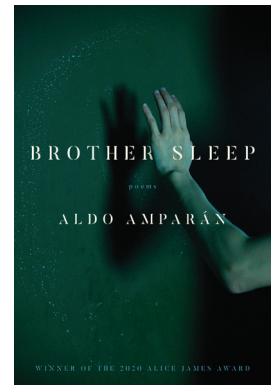
Of course, poetry is for everyone. There are a number of recent works for adult readers that speak in poetic language to the adversity and hope inherent in the human condition. Many of them were written by voices that complicate the canon, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) and LGBTQ+ writers whose poetic expressions shed light on their unique lived experiences and perceptions of the world (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Inclusive Voices for the Canon

Text	Themes
<i>Brother Sleep</i> by Aldo Amparán	LGBTQ+ and Mexican experiences, grief
<i>The Hurting Kind</i> by Ada Limón	Interconnectedness, survival, hope
<i>Time Is a Mother</i> by Ocean Vuong	Refugee, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ experiences, loss
<i>Perfect Black</i> by Crystal Wilkinson	African American experiences, abuse, mental illness
<i>The Tradition</i> by Jericho Brown	African American and LGBTQ+ experiences, history

Books of poetry by BIPOC and LGBTQ+ writers provide diverse perspectives on life in the United States.

The poems in these books include meditations on human existence through incisive, innovative language and insights gained through the authors' personal experiences. They affirm Native and diverse cultures in the United States and celebrate the beauty and power of the language of all Americans.



POETRY SPACES

Young people need spaces where they can practice the magic of poetry for themselves. The spaces don't have to be in classrooms; they can be extracurricular, such as New York City's Power Writers, a school-based group that gathers to "read and feed," sharing original poetry and giving constructive criticism (Fisher 128). The educators who moderate these spaces should offer mentor texts from a variety of poets of different gender identities, ethnicities, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds to help students see both the commonalities and the divergences of human experience. Moderators can ask students to be adventurous with innovative warm-ups, such as dancing to a 1920s Chicago blues record, examining visual art by Georgia O'Keefe, or describing an assortment of colorful fruits and vegetables fresh from the farmer's market, as Poetry for the People (P4P) members did when they took the movement from the University of California, Berkeley into Bay Area schools and neighborhoods (Muller 161).

Founded by June Jordan, P4P established the basic framework for poetry interventions: a whole-group open mic period, a lecture and discussion on a particular poetic topic, then smaller workshop groupings to give feedback on original poetry (Muller 13). Members who conducted P4P sessions in schools described students who, though disenchanted with school in general, were active, engaged contributors to poetry sessions. The learning that takes place in poetry spaces can also carry over into other academic areas, as when Damon, a Black and Filipino student who used poetry as "a place to construct self" and explore his racial identity,

transferred the process of ongoing revision he'd learned in poetry sessions to the essays he wrote for English class (Jocson 705).

Poetry is empowering as an act of communication and communion with others. A poem presupposes an audience, an assurance that the poet's voice

The populist poetry movement sees poems as something to be cut up, borrowed from, parodied, played with. Poetry belongs to its readers.

will be heard. Sometimes poetry manifests as a full-fledged performance, as in slam poetry. Lindsay Ellis and her colleagues describe a weeklong slam poetry workshop that culminated in a competition where students cheered for each other, laughed raucously at jokes, and

tallied up scores as if they were at a sporting event. This affective dimension of the poetry space, the culture of camaraderie and collaboration it fosters, is indicative of its populist roots. The populist poetry movement sees poems as something to be cut up, borrowed from, parodied, played with.

Poetry belongs to its readers. Poetry is, quite literally, *for the people*. Students should be encouraged to collect and reorganize poems, to read them orally and chorally, “and to otherwise muck around with poetry and the English language by taking pleasure as much in their own as in the poet's cleverness” (Faust and Dressman 117). Poet Craig Czury takes these populist affordances seriously; he earned the key to the city of Scranton, Pennsylvania, for a poem opera that he coordinated using poetic fusions between diverse community members and that was delivered chorally in a style he likens to jazz phrasing. Often, Czury lets young people take on the role of “composer,” performing reconstructions they've made by linking and reordering lines from different poems—that echo each other thematically, linguistically, or otherwise—on poster paper rolls hanging around the workspace. “It not only creates a poem in many voices,” Czury

muses, “but it's a documentary of a community of people.”

THE FUTURE WE STAND FOR

Disengagement from school is rampant, and even more prevalent among students of color, who have a slew of additional factors to their detriment. A majority of secondary students report not being able to see the point of what they're learning (Mehta and Fine 3–4). Baines and Stanley found that the words high schoolers used most frequently to describe their daily routines were “boring” and “stupid” (167). In this climate, the opportunities for self-expression and validation that poetry spaces provide are of more pressing importance than they've ever been before. Look at these lines by Ife Islam from the poem “The American Education System”:

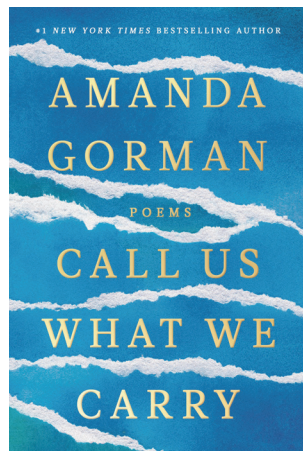
For student zombies dragging their feet
 Through two hundred year old hallways

 leave your dreams at the door
 No pencils in English
 No pens in Mathematics
 And no faith in the building
 (21)

The student recognizes the dehumanization inherent in the public school system and rejects it, instead urging his classmates to carry “holy books” of poetry on their backs (21).

Amanda Gorman tells us, “[P]oetry is the lens we use to interrogate the history we stand on and the future we stand for” (Obama). Our responsibility as educators is to help create a future that's worth standing for, a future in which young people have a voice, a sense of purpose, and authentic kinship with others. We should be making connections with adolescents, helping them find the sense of belonging that they so desperately need, and poetry spaces should be among our tools for doing so.

Poetry encourages empathy, interconnection. These lines by 14-year-old



Antonia Vázquez demonstrate how the poet responded to the death of yet another young person of color at the hands of police by connecting Elijah McClain's life to her own:

My life is full of *ifs*—
 moments when
 if one thing had been different
 everything
 would be changed
 rearranged
 The zigzag scar across my head
 like Longfellow's cross of snow,
 white against brown skin
 can never be erased
 effaced
 It's as much a part of me
 as my crooked teeth and size seven feet

That moment when I met concrete,
 hands in pockets
 three years old
 at Abuelita's house
 can't be undone
 The die was cast,
 the web was spun

If Elijah McClain hadn't gone to the store
 that day,
 if someone hadn't called to say,

9-1-1
emergency
this guy looks sketchy
ski mask
Black male

If only the police
 had let him explain,
 the same officers who held him down
 by the neck,
 who chose to inject
 his 140-pound body
 with twice as much ketamine
 as his heart could stand.

His blood's on their hands.

If he hadn't walked to the store
 for an iced tea,
 he,
 Elijah McClain,
 would be here today
 twenty-five,
 a vegetarian,
 still playing the violin
 to shelter kittens
 so they wouldn't feel alone.

This poem shows the poet's empathy for McClain, a young person of color like herself. For students such as Antonia, poetry provides a safe space for working out painful experiences. They can confront these events through the written word, dealing with them in ways that make them feel brave and empowered, and they can share their feelings with others through spoken word forums that facilitate connection with others.

Poetry has a unique capacity for enabling us to bear the vicissitudes of human existence. Winston Churchill quoted snatches of poetry (and composed verses of his own) during times of global and personal peril. Saint John Paul II, a prolific poet who counted among his papal writings a *Letter to Artists*, worked out his faith through profound poetic meditations. Former presidents Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama are both published poets. Alissa Rubin, a *New York Times* war correspondent stationed in Baghdad and Kabul, attests to the indispensable insight and solace that poetry can provide, even amid devastating carnage.

Poetry saved my life as a young person, but the story didn't end there; poetry has continued to shape my life. It's helped me capture beautiful moments, such as my young children's milestones, and survive difficult ones, including a troubling medical diagnosis. It reminds me that "this quintessence of dust" (Shakespeare) is not all there is: the universe is vast, and I have my place in it. Writing poetry also helps me to forge connections with the young people I teach. When one of my Mexican students confided in me about someone shouting, "Go back to Mexico" at her, after the storm of impotent rage passed, I reworked the experience into a poem. I wrote about

a young woman whose identity is formed by two countries, one of which she has never known.

Home

The air cools.
The sun, which had trembled beneath the day's weight,
pixelating the water for a time, has surrendered
—*se rinde*—

In the old myths, it's this sacrifice,
the sun's daily death,
that sustains the race of mortals below,
men like her father, brown backs bent
under their variable burdens:
jícamas, camotes, cocos, blue agave, matz all colors,
and tobacco, the same tyranny of sheaves
that Papi hangs to dry on skeletal scaffolds
in Mr. Parker's barn.

Sacrifice

Later, the Son's death supplanted the sun's:
Juan Diego knelt at Our Lady's feet in Tepeyac,
and roses bloomed
the way Mami kneels sowing beauty into their
plot of borrowed soil
dahlias, snapdragons, marigolds
—*flor de jamaica* won't grow here—
and Paco sets his jaw against calculus
(*our people made zero*)
spilling stubborn hieroglyphs across the page,
incantations against farm work
and surrender
—*no se rinde*—

And Soledad, because she too is Sol
and daily reborn
stands in the gloom at the river's edge and
stretches her body
in a daffodil's arc
toward the space
the sun left behind.

She is made of this place,
the patchwork mountains
muscadines, each with its burst of sweetness
blackberries wrested from thorny limbs
frost on tin roof and musty milk house,
with floors trod slick by ghost hooves.

The words have ceased to sting her ears
—*go back to Mexico*—

she's fed the river her tears.
Mexico is a memory her parents carry
stories-songs-map-legend.
Home is not there, and Mami will be serving
the *pozole*.
So she wipes her face, sets her features back to zero,
and takes a last look before starting up the path.

It's all hers:
the still air that carries the river's song
the pin-prick stars
and gathering choir of frogs
dark trees like sentinels on the other side.
No two Adams could have thrown away so
much!

Soledad climbs,
quickens her pace on the concrete steps,
terraced like a ziggurat,
thinking of Paco's modest pride at the *crac!* of
ball to bat,
her mother's swinging braid,
and Papi's belly laugh
after a cold beer,
Paco's rounding the bases—
home, she whispers, touching toe to mat.
Home is here.

Poetry has been a blessing to me, like the “coming home” that Ada Limón recognized as a universal and desperate need. Our students can experience that sense of coming home, too. Poetry is a gift that we must share with them. **EJ**

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

Whether you teach poetry as a unit or weave it into your lessons throughout the year, poetry is powerful and speaks to both students and educators alike. Visit this page to see the featured poets NCTE members are teaching right now and view the member-curated resources. <http://bit.ly/3wJBDfP>

KRISTIE CAMP

Walking the Borderlands and Writing in the Woods

Students build a unique community of writers through outdoor literacy activities guided by their teacher.

It made me think about the small, beautiful things that happen every day. We may not see, and all we can do is just be there with that presence.

—RAY (PSEUDONYM), AGE 16

It is this way with wonder: it takes a bit of patience, and it takes putting yourself in the right place at the right time. It requires that we be curious enough to forgo our small distractions in order to find the world.

—AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL, *WORLD OF WONDERS: IN PRAISE OF FIREFLIES, WHALE SHARKS, AND OTHER ASTONISHMENTS*

Turtles retreat into their shells when they feel threatened, finding protection by withdrawing, similar to the protective retreat many people made when the COVID-19 pandemic threatened our safety. Students, teachers, and families emerged from their shells timidly, reluctant to expose themselves, finding comfort in separation. When 18 juniors began Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition class with me in August 2021, they all wore masks and sat behind cardboard shields taped to their desks, hidden behind protective shells, some reluctant to reengage.

We had returned to school for in-person learning after a year of hybrid instruction, and despite repeated calls to return to normalcy, taped arrows on the floor did not lead us back to school as we knew it before the lockdown. In this small, Southern, working-class town, our school had often served

as a social center, similar to a junction city that connected people countywide through their common experiences. Despite having taught for 24 years in this same school, I was unsure of how to begin rebuilding our junction city after the lockdown had scattered us, but I knew that in English language arts class, creating a community of writers required trust and connection. Maybe we needed to move class outside, to ditch the shields and abandon the expectations of returning to a sterile classroom. Nature would offer its healing properties and a fertile learning environment, if we were brave enough to do as Gloria Anzaldúa suggests, to “[leave] the familiar and safe home-ground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain” (35).

Creating an extended nature writing unit seemed a logical choice when I considered how scattered and varied students’ classroom literacy experiences had been over the last three semesters. They needed time to write, reflect, and revise; string journals foster such long-term reflection. Nature writing is often represented on the AP exam; time spent analyzing compelling examples would not be time wasted, but I needed a powerful and representative mentor text to guide our learning.

My search led to *World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil, whose openness about her experiences growing up resonate with many in my classroom; her blending of genres and disciplines within the text offers relatable ways for students to access science, nature, and self-reflection. Compiled

TABLE 1
Additional Border-Crossing Nature Writing

Text	Genre	Application
<i>The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love</i> <i>Affair with Nature</i> by J. Drew Lanham	Memoir	Comparison with Nezhukumathil's book; exploration of heritage and identity
<i>Outside In</i> by Deborah Underwood <i>Listen</i> by Holly M. McGhee <i>One Earth</i> by Eileen Spinelli <i>We Are Water Protectors</i> by Carole Lindstrom	Picture book	Mentor text for creative response; visual rhetoric
"The Tradition" in <i>The Tradition</i> by Jericho Brown "Calling Things What They Are" and "Drowning Creek" in <i>The Hurting Kind: Poems</i> by Ada Limón "Touchpool" and "When All of My Cousins Are Married" in <i>At the Drive-In Volcano: Poems</i> by Aimee Nezhukumathil	Poetry	Diction, tone, and figurative language analysis; mentor text for creative response

These texts are additional options for creating a multigenre literacy and nature unit.

as a series of anecdotes where each chapter centers on something natural (a plant, animal, or landscape) as a metaphor for an observation about life, the book develops into a poetic memoir of the writer, who is a poet, professor, wife, mom of two boys, and daughter of a mom from the Philippines and a dad from India.

The quest to build a community of writers began with a daily read-aloud from *World of Wonders*, which was usually followed by a short response activity, and a weekly walk outside, where we wrote an entry in our string journals. The purpose of our string journals was to practice our observation and description skills, to follow Nezhukumathil's lead by describing what we saw and connecting it to something in our lives. We studied Nezhukumathil's techniques of naming things in nature and mixing anecdotes with scientific facts as a model for our revised creative essays. Yet, in an AP class, we must also prepare for the exam, and *World of Wonders* provided a banquet of rhetorically rich language, ripe for analysis. Finally, we developed multimodal projects for other trail walkers to view, and we wrote emails to the author. These writing experiences formed the four central writing lessons I paired with Nezhukumathil's text: informal, exploratory freewriting; revised and polished creative essays; exam preparation; and digital creations for an authentic audience.

In this article, I share details and examples from these central writing experiences from our semester-long literacy and nature project. By highlighting student voices as they responded to the text, I also recommend *World of Wonders* as an inclusive, border-crossing mentor text for adolescent writers. (For more texts to build a literacy and nature unit, see Table 1.) Overall, I make the argument that crossing the traditional, physical borders that contain an English language arts class can create unique, shared experiences that foster a productive writing community.

THE CLASS

Nature itself is not without its boundaries, however. As I spent time outdoors during the pandemic, listening to podcasts such as *Wild Ideas Worth Living* and *The Trail Ahead*, I learned that time in nature and the benefits it brings may not be so readily available to all my students, especially if they are people of color or if they have less expendable income. Access to the outdoors, similar to access to representative texts, is an issue of equity

Access to the outdoors, similar to access to representative texts, is an issue of equity and justice; students who enjoy access to both reap cultural, physical, and academic benefits.

and justice; students who enjoy access to both reap cultural, physical, and academic benefits. Mixing in meaningful writing opportunities can provide an outlet for self-expression and identity exploration.

Choice in writing, including the choice to write in one's own language, is a key ingredient for meaningful writing opportunities. These truths served as the philosophical foundation for building a semester-long literacy and nature project in which we might step toward Anzaldúa's lofty goal of "participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet" (103).

The class consisted of an eclectic mix of intellectuals who brought with them artistic, musical, and athletic talents from a wide array of backgrounds, creating an underrepresented culture of its own in this predominantly White school setting where I represented the status quo: White, heterosexual, and able-bodied. Nearly half the students in the class spoke multiple languages learned from their parents—who had emigrated from the Philippines, Guatemala, India, or Mexico—and all but three were people of color, including four who claimed multiple ethnic heritages.

Anitra (all student names are pseudonyms) said she felt left behind because she was not interested in dating or clothes or the stereotypical topics people associate with teen girls. Another student wrote about anxiety and depression, which limited their ability to complete work on time. Gracie and Hunter straddled two demanding worlds as advanced students and athletes. Patricia and Bridget wrote about being members of belief communities different from the dominant religious organizations in our area. At least three students, Steven, Gracie, and Bridget, wrote about their desire to be known as artists and musicians, outside of or in addition to any other labels given them. Their identities defied such labels.

STRING JOURNALS

Writing opportunities should, at times, defy labels too, which is why I chose string journals as a consistent creative outlet, a way for students to express themselves without boundaries. I learned about string journals when I studied for a week at the

Walden Woods Project in 2019. String journals start with a string tied to a particular place, and the writer returns to that place regularly to write. Each time the writer visits the string, they observe their surroundings and their feelings and then write about their observations (see Figure 1).

I created and laminated a name tag for each student and then gave them some weatherproof twine, and they set off to find their string journal spot in a patch of woods just across the street from our school. I set up a spot for myself so I could write with them, and we visited these spots seven times throughout the semester. Students could express their ideas in any written format: drawing, storytelling, phrases, lists, descriptions, or whichever method they wanted to record their thoughts that day. By the end of the semester, they had a record of their time spent at the spot. This collection served as a starting point for our final projects, but the journals were also a place to explore ideas and experiment with styles, a limitless playground for writing and thinking and feeling.



FIGURE 1
Students marked their chosen string journal spot with these name tags.

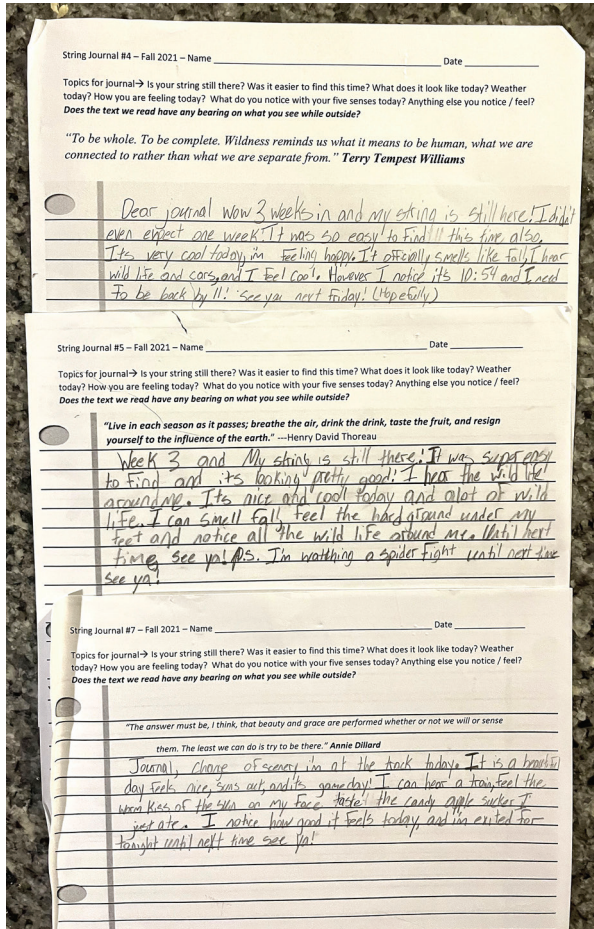


FIGURE 2
Students chose how they would respond in their journals.

Their string journals displayed each writer's personality from the very first entry as students wrote exactly what was on their minds, magnifying their authentic voices. Without boundaries, some students chose to draw, others wrote notes in just words and phrases, and still others wrote as if they were writing a letter to themselves or to an imaginary compatriot. The early entries were filled with casual talk—comments about a chemistry test, their shoes, their job, or an upcoming ball game. The entries included observations about creatures they encountered and stories about classmates, such as when Bridget wrote, “Not even five minutes out here and Ray already picked up a cicada off of the ground.”

Students' observations followed a loose pattern, with nearly everyone beginning each journal entry exactly where I had asked them to begin: with observations of what they saw or heard or smelled. As the semester progressed, however, their sensory observations often moved into the metacognitive realm, as they began to write about the changes they saw as

they observed one spot over time (see Figure 2). Then came wonderings about why they noticed that same tree or that same color each time. For instance, one student wrote, “[A]t this point, finding the string is muscle memory.”

As the walk to their spot became familiar, students began to make comments such as “[T]he string is still here, despite everything,” and “It’s amazing how much change comes in two weeks.” Another student wove nearly a paragraph around the description of one tree, ending with “[C]hances are, it was here before I was born, and it may be here after I’m gone.”

REFLECTIVE, CREATIVE ESSAYS

Each day in the classroom, I read aloud a chapter from *World of Wonders*, and then we talked about our reactions to that chapter. Sometimes we wrote responses, but primarily, the shared reading of the text became a collective home base for our nature adventures. Twice in the semester Nezhukumatathil’s memoir served as a mentor text for our own writing: first for a reflection about our names and second for our language memoirs.

Names matter in Nezhukumatathil’s book, as she begins each chapter with a common name and a scientific name for the natural element that serves as the central image of that chapter. For example, Chapter 2 is about the firefly, or *Phontinus pyralis*, which becomes a symbol for special family moments, and we find ourselves wishing, similar to Nezhukumatathil, that we might “keep those summer nights with my family inside an empty jam jar, with holes poked in the lid, a twig and a few strands of grass tucked inside” (14).

Nezhukumatathil returns to the fireflies near the end of the book, in the chapter “Firefly (Redux),” and reminds us of their official name (155). But fireflies have many other names, so many that they take up an entire paragraph as she shows us that something is clearly “lost when you grow up not knowing the names for different varieties of fireflies” (158). Inspired by the care with which Nezhukumatathil names people, animals, and places in her book, we took a moment to consider our own names, their origins and meanings, and the power they hold.

The name essays seemed to be a way for students to examine their identities and their relationships with those who had chosen their names, and the students expressed pride in their names, even if they had not always recognized that pride. Students wrote this essay early in the semester, after we had read the first three chapters of the book and after I shared my name essay with them, which allowed us to learn about each other as humans as I learned about their writing skills. While many name stories started with details about students' parents, those stories often expanded into discussions of heritage and included anecdotes about their religion, ethnicity, and traditions.

For example, Anitra found family connection when she considered “how many family members have a name close to mine,” but then her observations moved to contemplations, and she said, “Sometimes . . . when I hear my name . . . it makes me wonder if I am leaving behind a legacy that will be loved or hated by others. Loved or hated by God.” Sally became personally reflective, noting that her name “is the name of a girl who had enough empathy to understand the two sides of both parents' stories at only eight years old . . . the same girl that has to plan out how many outfits she'll need to pack every other weekend.”

Students wrote language memoirs after collecting observations about the ways Nezhukumatathil portrays communication, which extends to the natural world. I asked students to develop their own claim about language and how the languages they speak have affected their lives and perspectives. In their language memoirs, students explored their heritages again, but they also played with writing dialect in a personally meaningful way, as they described grandparents or told stories about their families. For example, Gracie wrote about her grandparents using “words like ‘Make me a tomaters sandwich,’ or ‘Can you close that winder for me?’” Hunter told a humorous story about spilling some tea—“[M]y sister walked in and said, ‘OMG mom I have some tea.’ Mom then followed with, ‘no baby we’ve been out of tea.’ The funniest part happened next when I heard my dad in the back of the house yell ‘WE HAVE TEA!’”—which was followed by a lesson on how “tea” is really just gossip.

A consistent theme in this group's writing was a sense of creating a persona, explaining that they had been taught to speak one way in front of others and another way at home, crafting an image through their language in public spaces. Patricia made connections between language and heritage, saying that as a child, she had never hesitated to talk about her religion because “there is a link between religion and language. . . .” Maria and Ray expressed sadness for not maintaining proficiency in their heritage language, telling stories of trying to learn English but also trying to communicate effectively with grandparents who didn't speak English. Ray explained that his “native language would diminish each day. I would barely use my native language because no one else knew it.”

EXAM PREPARATION

AP students must, of course, prepare for the AP exam, and the rich, layered text of Nezhukumatathil's memoir offers a garden of samples for rhetorical analysis. In addition, students practiced writing claim-evidence-reasoning paragraphs where they crafted claims about issues presented in the book and offered evidence from the text to support their claims. After reading Chapter 1, students developed a claim to describe Nezhukumatathil as a speaker and used evidence from Chapter 1 with their reasoning to support the claim. Later, they made a claim about the metaphorical meaning of one element of nature discussed in the book and supported that claim with evidence from the book and from their personal lives. These assignments worked as on-demand practice in which they responded to the text immediately after reading it, as they would in a testing situation.

A particularly rich passage is the chapter on axolotls; Nezhukumatathil lures us into identifying with the axolotl's pasted-on smile and elicits sympathy for this sea creature near extinction. After we have opened our hearts to this endangered symbol of stoicism, she reveals the axolotl's true nature in the last paragraph of the chapter: its “cannibalistic . . . eating habits” and its “claws designed” to create “a wild mess—when it gathers a tangle of bloodworms into

its mouth” (47). This chapter spurred questioning and debate, which sharpened critical thinking as students sparred over the implications of the last paragraph.

The axolotl was a popular writing topic as we studied the first half of the book, along with the vampire squid and the touch-me-nots, as students found these creatures quite relatable. To explain their symbolism, students told stories about plastering on smiles when someone insulted them, wanting to disappear to avoid unpleasant people, and resenting unwanted touches. For example, Anitra wrote about the vampire squid because “I personally understand that feeling of wanting to disappear from my problems and wanting to escape the judgement of others.”

EXTENDING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM DIGITALLY

To share their observations and thoughts with our community, students created their own responses in digital format and then linked them to QR codes. Then, I printed and laminated the codes so students could post them at their string journal spots. Anyone who takes a walk on the trail can now tune in and hear original nature writing. Student responses ranged from poems they wrote, recited, and illustrated in a slide show, to personal narrative essays recited with music in the background. Accompanying the digital response, students wrote a final reflective essay in which they contemplated what they had discovered in our nature walk project. Some chose to be poetic: “Just as the leaves on the Trees are falling, people are learning to become who they are truly meant to be. Shedding the opinions of people and the stress that they carry.” Others examined the experience through the lens of their emotions: “There is a different vibe in the classroom the day we are going outside,” and “there was a significant connection between what we wrote and how we felt,” but “all that matters the most is the amount of happiness and memories we made out there.”

To end the unit, students wrote emails to Nezhukumathil, telling her why specific parts of the book resonated with them. Some shared their own memories with the author through stories of capturing fireflies when they were younger. Maria

told Nezhukumathil “not to worry about kids in the current generation forgetting about fireflies because I will make sure that almost everyone I know is aware of the existence of lightning bugs.” Students’ messages included lingering questions about the creatures described in the book and rave reviews of the Cara Cara oranges we ate, but they also told their own stories.

Hunter was taken “back to those days when I was younger chasing my dog and” the book “made me grin a little when I read that everyone has the same struggles with any animal.” Maria told Nezhukumathil that the chapter on the octopus dying after it had been taken out of its habitat brought her to tears, especially because we had done the same thing to the turtle we found in the woods on one of our walks, even though we released the turtle back into the wild a couple of days after we found him. “The turtle was the first thought that came to mind when we read that octopus chapter, and I still think about it now,” Maria wrote.

RETRACING OUR STEPS

Throughout all the diverse ways students reflected and created as a result of reading Nezhukumathil’s memoir and walking together in the woods, their works displayed some repeated themes. The students often described feeling constrained by labels, and they often expressed a desire to pull away from society, yet they also consistently expressed a desire to be recognized as their authentic selves. More than one student noted their feelings of admiration for the way Nezhukumathil presented her truths and commented on how they felt inspired to do the same. I may have known intellectually that representation matters for my students, but I learned how much it mattered when Patricia wrote to Nezhukumathil of her “common struggles . . . growing up in an Indian household when born in the US. When you mentioned the accounts where you faced racism in your classroom while doing the peacock activity, I could imagine that being me. . . .”

World of Wonders became a conduit through which students could examine their own experiences and feel empowered to express their thoughts. Yet the walks in the woods built a community that helped


The moments spent walking from the classroom to our string journal spots were times of casual conversations, the kinds of discussions that do not often fit into a bell-to-bell classroom agenda.

students feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts. The moments spent walking from the classroom to our string journal spots were times of casual conversations where we discussed whatever was on our minds, the kinds of discussions that do not often fit into a bell-to-bell classroom agenda. Those

discussions helped us learn about each other and built trust; the collective experiences gave us common stories.

At the beginning of the semester, we were like the turtle we found in the woods and brought back to class: our true selves hidden, poking our heads into society when necessary, engaging in minimal interaction. The walks helped us cross the border from a sterile classroom to a verdant learning space. The shared experience drew us out of our shells, and as the semester passed, our conversations moved from small talk to meaningful interchanges—but slowly, as trust can be dangerous territory. Sharing the adventure outside prepared us to share our reactions as we read together inside because we had already learned we could trust each other with our own stories out in the woods. To “forgo our small distractions,” as Nezhukumatathil (156) says, we needed to walk out the door to an open space where the wonder of community and connection could

be found in the “small beautiful things,” as Ray described them.

In his final essay, Ray mentioned that on our last walk, he “returned to where it all began, . . . hoping for a deer to appear again, but nothing happened.” That observation brought him to this conclusion: “I’ve learned that things change as we live, but each change has its beauty, and it may be terrifying. . . . Finally, I’ve learned to look up more often. One who keeps their head up will see more to life than those who keep their heads down.” 

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READWRITETHINKCONNECTION

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

To promote development, detail, and focus of ideas in students' writing, it sometimes helps to start with a fun, creative writing activity that encourages what you want to see in all of their writing. In this mini-lesson, students practice writing detailed, sensory-rich descriptions by framing a small piece of nature and freewriting about it. From this, students can develop a variety of types of writing, including poetry, short stories, science writing, reflections, and other academic genres. <http://bit.ly/3fsd529>

KAREN LOPEZ

“The Things I Cannot Say”: Empowering Emergent Bilingual Learners

Emergent bilinguals who experience inquiry-based learning activities gain transformative benefits that can lead to rhetorical literacies and greater confidence.

The youth arose.

—STEPHEN CRANE, *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

I was away below the ferry now. I rose up, and there was Jackson’s Island. . . .

—MARK TWAIN, *ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

From the beginning of my ongoing, decades-long career, whether teaching first-year composition as a graduate student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, junior high or high school students enrolled in my English language arts classes, or adults enrolled in university satellite programs or workshops I lead, my primary goal has always been to create moments of interactive, inquiry-based learning. However, in 2018, after California elected to mainstream emergent bilinguals of all language proficiency levels, a new challenge presented itself: my “integrated” Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) classes, designed by the California State University (CSU) to prepare students for the rigors of college-level reading and writing, would now include not just Level 3 and 4 emergent bilinguals but Level 1 and 2 students as well.

Additionally, the newly created “designated” Achieve class I had volunteered to teach would be devoted solely to supporting Level 1 and 2 students concurrently enrolled in my ERWC classes. Would I

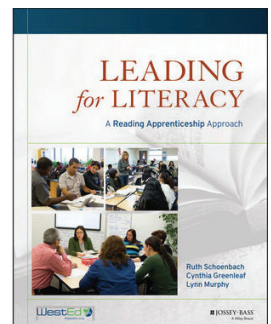
be capable of creating exciting, inquiry-based activities for the Level 1 and 2 emergent bilinguals in my charge, or would language challenges prevent this kind of transformative interaction?

Inspired by the professional learning I received as an ERWC certification workshop Teacher Leader invited to write an ERWC integrated/designated module, I resolved that inquiry-based activities would be an integral part of both my designated and integrated class curriculum. This decision led to a crucial discovery: inquiry-based activities are, in fact, a particularly effective means of empowering emergent bilinguals to become more confident learners and individuals.

In *Leading for Literacy: A Reading Apprenticeship Approach*, Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, and Lynn Murphy define inquiry as:

an active, intentional process animated by questions and observations. The inquirer actively engages in constructing new understandings by building theories, finding patterns, and making meaning. Inquiry experiences are therefore potentially transformative in their impact on knowledge and practices. (51)

Building upon this definition, the authors of the ERWC “Theoretical Foundations for Reading and Writing Rhetorically” (Katz et al.) point out that when students are engaged in an inquiry-based activity, instead of being



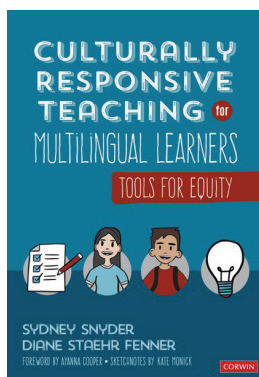
expected to provide “right” answers, they are encouraged to become “flexible, adaptive, and reflective thinkers and communicators” (5). This is an apt description of the kind of engagement based on “rigorous content” that Sydney Snyder and Diane Staehr Fenner identify in *Culturally Responsive Teaching for Multilingual Learners: Tools for Equity* as “critical” when supporting emergent bilinguals to acquire the “academic mindset” necessary to receive an “equitable education” (110).

Specifics delineating the “habits of mind” that constitute an academic mindset are identified in the study *Academic Literacy: A Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California’s Public Colleges and Universities*, which inspired the creation of ERWC. Based on a survey of faculty representing community colleges and four-year CSU and University of California systems, the study found that instructors considered six habits of mind to be “important to students’ success”: “exhibit curiosity,” “experiment with new ideas,” “see other points of view,” “engage in intellectual discussions,” “exhibit respect for other viewpoints,” and “read with awareness of self and others” (13).

In this article, I will describe two of the inquiry-based practices that support the development of these habits: (1) engaging students in a study of thought-provoking texts that prompt personal discoveries; and (2) encouraging students to document their life experiences by applying an inquiry-based approach to their own lives. My findings confirm a philosophy honed by Roberta Ching, professor emerita at CSU Sacramento and an ERWC Steering Committee member, that inspired both the writing of my module and the inquiry-based activities

I subsequently provided in my designated classes: *higher-level thinking fosters higher-level language, not the other way around.*

To create inquiry-based activities, I select texts that don’t tell students what to think but provoke thinking of their own, articles which often focus on relatable young people who can serve as role models.



EMPLOYING THOUGHT-PROVOKING TEXTS

To create inquiry-based activities, I select texts that don’t *tell* students what to think but *provoke* thinking of their own, articles which often focus on relatable young people who can serve as role models. Three of the practices I have found to be most effective are: (1) prereading activities that feature tactile experiences and prediction-making to generate stu-

dent interest and a sense of connection with what they are about to read; (2) chunking texts to ensure close readings that provoke inference-making and personal discoveries; and (3) postreading reflection that encourages students to apply what they have learned to their own lives while also consciously acknowledging the habits of mind they employed during the reading process.

Essential to all three of these practices is students sharing their thinking in both written and oral form, along with celebrating their ideas by “publishing” them on whiteboards, overheads, and distributed copies.

The inspiring *Los Angeles Times* article “He Knocks on Doors and They Open’ against Odds” by Teresa Watanabe is a good example of the type of text I use, and for this reason I selected it to augment the ERWC What’s Next? module. In the article, Watanabe details the life of a young man named Damion Lester Jr. who was removed from his parents at the age of three and raised by his grandparents in an area which, according to the author, “ranks third in violent crime among 200 [Los Angeles] neighborhoods mapped by *The Times*.”

Despite these challenges, after being elected class president three years in a row and student body president his senior year, Damion was scheduled to graduate from Washington Preparatory High School as valedictorian with a 4.1 grade point average and a letter of acceptance from the University of California, Davis. His counselor sums up Damion’s accomplishments with a metaphor that inspired Watanabe’s title: “He knocks on doors, and they open.”

To guide inquiry-based thinking and the habits of mind that kind of thinking requires, before

introducing the article, I invited students to participate in a tactile experience by asking for a volunteer to go outside and knock on our classroom's locked door until I opened it. As a class, we listened uneasily to the knocks until everyone agreed that I should let the student in. Once he was inside the classroom, we asked the student how it felt to knock on the locked door without any kind of response. After the volunteer shared his feelings, I encouraged class members to imagine how *they* would have felt in the same situation.

As we generated a list of words to express their feelings and documented them on the whiteboard, students shared that closed doors made them feel "locked out," "frustrated," "helpless," "shunned," "angry," "unwanted," and "excluded." Some shared memories of times they had knocked unsuccessfully on locked doors: losing a key and being locked out of their apartment when no one was home; or knocking on a friend's door and having the uneasy feeling that it wasn't being answered because they were not welcome; or knocking on a classroom door during an unannounced tardy lockout, feeling shunned and ashamed.

Following this, I engaged students in a prediction activity by writing the article's title on the board and asking students to predict what the article might be about and what the term *doors* might symbolize. Next, with the purpose of helping students further connect with the young man we were going to read about, I had them reflect on some closed doors that they had experienced in their own lives. To guide them to visualize this metaphor, I distributed individual copies of a coloring book picture of a closed door. Students each listed their ideas on their own copy, providing an invaluable glimpse into their lives and concerns: citizenship, money, family problems, transportation, not knowing the language, shyness, social status, economic status, lack of life experience, work, society, self-discipline, attitude, and fear.

Once they had recorded their thoughts and shared them out as a class, I showed them a picture of Damion Lester Jr., introducing him only as a high school student in Los Angeles, California. Reassured that they felt fully connected to Damion before even

reading about him, I distributed copies of the article's introduction along with a fresh picture of another closed door. As we read the introduction together and then continued to read the rest of the article, students were encouraged to use this picture to keep track of the closed doors that Damion encountered.

Providing students with only the title and then the introduction is a form of *chunking*, an essential reading strategy that I find particularly helpful with emergent bilinguals for the following reasons. First, chunking *enables* reluctant readers to sample a manageable section of a text that, as one memorable student candidly pointed out, includes "just too many words on the page." Second, just like free cookie samples offered in a grocery store can convince shoppers to buy a whole box, chunked "samples" of text *entice* further reading. Third, because students are unable to read ahead to see what's coming next, chunking *encourages* meaningful text-based predictions. Finally, chunked passages *ensure* close readings, which are especially helpful to emergent bilinguals when sifting out words or phrases they don't understand.

Because of all the above reasons, while we continued to navigate the Damion Lester Jr. article together, I slowly presented students with strategically selected chunks of the article so that they could more easily identify the "closed door" obstacles Damion had encountered in his life before moving on to an inquiry of what qualities Damion possessed that enabled him to open those doors. To conclude our study of this article, students were asked to write a reflection identifying which of Damion's qualities they thought they already possessed, or a quality they would like to develop, accompanied by a discussion of *why* they found that quality to be so valuable.

At the conclusion of inquiry-based activities like this, Snyder and Fenner stress the importance of students reflecting on which aspects of an academic mindset they have demonstrated (112). In this case, students had the opportunity to realize, appreciate, and celebrate that *they* had modeled all six habits that we had focused on in class. I share the following incident as evidence.

When reading the Damion Lester Jr. article with students in my 7:00 a.m. class, I asked them to

consider what they thought Damion’s counselor was implying about him when she made the metaphorical comment, “He knocks on doors and they open.” It was the Thursday before prom, when many students were distracted by thoughts of Friday night’s festivities, and so, when no one responded, I chose to continue with the article rather than pushing for an immediate interpretation. Later that day in my Achieve class, Eric (pseudonym), the only student who had been present in my early-morning integrated class, came up to me and confided, “I have been thinking about that quote we read this morning, and I know what it means.”

Eager to hear his response, I urged him to tell me. With a mischievous twinkle in his eye (which definitely exhibited curiosity and a determination to experiment with ideas), he replied, “I’m writing about it.”

VALUING PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Snyder and Fenner emphasize how “crucial” it is to teach from an assets-based perspective (as opposed to a deficit-based approach) while working with emergent bilinguals (75). One of the several strategies they suggest for promoting this kind of approach is to encourage students to share their own stories as a way “to build bridges and to help foster connections” (85). Over two decades of helping seniors write college application essays, I have found this to be true for all students—but especially emergent bilinguals.

As a result, I now require all students in my integrated ERWC classes to write college application essays, whether or not they are planning to attend college or are required to write an essay as part of their application process. I do this because of the personal relationship it allows me to build with each student, and because I think all seniors benefit from celebrating memorable experiences in their lives that have shaped their character.

I base my college application essay assignment criteria on advice provided by Katherine Cohen in her cleverly titled book *Rock Hard Apps: How to Write a Killer College Application*. She emphasizes that all college application essay topics “essentially ask the same question: *What makes you tick?*” and that essays

should reveal “significant aspects of your character and experience, providing insight into you both as a scholar and as a human being” (199). To accomplish this, students first need to decide what characteristics they want to reveal and which experience will showcase those characteristics.

Cohen suggests that the best topic is “an utterly unique story only you can tell” (201). I find this advice particularly meaningful for emergent bilinguals because so many of them have experienced painful challenges that either prompted their journey to America or became an integral part of it. Cohen’s advice encourages them to reflect on their experiences and see them as “utterly unique” stories that caused them to develop remarkable qualities similar to those modeled by Damion Lester Jr., such as tenacity, perseverance, strength of character, and the ability to overcome and grow from challenges. This requires students to use an inquiry-based approach when reflecting on their own lives.

As encouraged by Snyder and Fenner, we begin by reading mentor texts (86). In this case, the mentor texts we explore are not just articles written by professionals such as Teresa Watanabe, but narratives produced by former students of mine who have granted permission for me to share them as a means of inspiring other students. All of these models reflect Cohen’s insistence that applicants should *show* their “great qualities and characteristics,” *not tell* about them. “Let the reader conclude that you are exceptional *without actually saying it!*” Cohen advises (201).

To discover how these writers accomplished this goal, we use an inquiry-based approach: What qualities did each writer reveal? *How* were those qualities revealed? What sensory details did each author include to make their experience concrete? What figurative language did they create to help readers participate in their experience? As we explore these texts, students keep running lists of their favorite examples of sensory details and figurative language that can inspire their own narratives.

The first step I encourage students to take when generating their essays is to identify qualities they want to celebrate, followed by deciding on an incident that reveals those qualities. Once they have

decided on an incident, the students make a list of ten sensory details essential to that experience that will help it come alive for the reader. Making this list is also key to helping students surface their memories, but I have discovered that most students first need to *experience* sensory details in order to understand what they are and how to articulate them. In order to do this, I employ a tactile approach just as I do when helping students connect to text.

For example, on the day we will be reading an essay titled “Sharing Time” by my former student Alex C. Hess, I greet students at the door with an ominous warning: “Do not disturb the orange line!” Intrigued students are then met by the barrier of an orange crepe-paper streamer taped across their desks, dividing the front of the room from the back and provoking immediate interaction before class begins, and they are asked to record their predictions in quick-write form. After sharing their ideas, we begin to read Alex’s essay recounting a kindergarten experience where he longed to sit on a “gleaming orange line” woven into the “worn carpet” where only “popular” kids were allowed to sit.

Determined to win a seat on that enticing orange line, Alex invested all his creative energy into preparing a perfect show-and-tell presentation that he thought would win him instant popularity. Instead, a thoughtless classmate ruined his chances by immediately guessing the contents of his precious brown bag “engraved” with a red-crayon *G* for *goggles*. However, over Alex’s lifetime, that orange line acquired metaphorical significance—in the advice his offensive *line* coach offered to “drive adversity to the sidelines” and to “deliver 100% in every play”—along with the development of his own values and integrity that resulted in his reverencing a more worthy “orange line.”

On the day after reading “Sharing Time,” students further appreciate the sensory details Alex showcases in his essay: coloring book pictures of an elephant such as the one Alex so carefully colors while “obeying the rules and trying to stay within the lines as best I could,” accompanied by globs of “pungent paste” and boxes of “non-labeled bulky crayons” for students to share. Meanwhile, I serve miniature cups

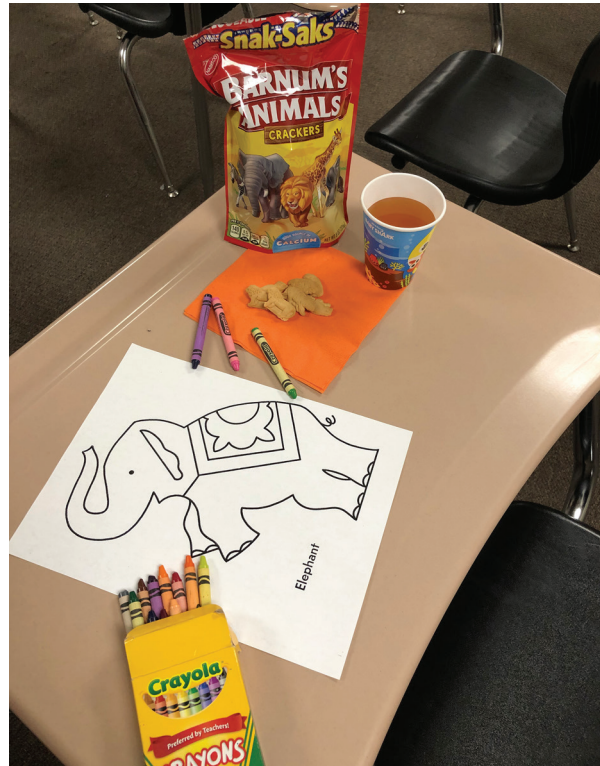


FIGURE 1
Students experience a classmate’s essay coming alive in their classroom. Photo courtesy of the author. Used with permission from the author.

of apple juice and spoonfuls of animal cookies just as Alex’s teacher with “the gentle storyteller’s voice” did before nap-time (see Figure 1). While students color and snack, I play recordings of familiar childhood songs, often responding to class requests.

By the end of this activity, students find that having been transported back to a comforting childhood memory where they experienced all five senses has readied them to generate sensory detail lists of their own. I approach the teaching of figurative language in a similar fashion, causing students to tactilely *experience* the power of similes, metaphors, and personification as a means of communicating their individual experiences.

By the end of this activity, students find that having been transported back to a comforting childhood memory where they experienced all five senses has readied them to generate sensory detail lists of their own.

After participating in activities such as these, in 2019, one of my Level 2 Achieve students wrote about his journey to America. Reminiscent of Huckleberry Finn, Kristoffer Cortes’s journey was motivated by the desire to escape an abusive birth father whose fist “looked harder than a rock.” He eloquently describes the impact of his last beating as follows: “The night passed and the only thing that was heard was the small, soothing sound of the water hitting the windows, but the only drops of water that fell to the floor were those of my tears.” Perhaps more purposefully and artistically than any other student enrolled in my ERWC classes that year, Kristoffer understood the power of the many models of sensory details, figurative language, and symbolic imagery we had studied as a means of conveying very personal experiences.

Kristoffer opens his essay with the following line, introducing the images of windows and the color gray that reappear and increase in meaning throughout his essay: “It was cold day like every day of the week, sometimes it is light and sometimes it is gray, showing as if every day it was a giant window where a curtain covers the sun’s rays and this is how it begins my day. . . .” He deliberately returns to these two images in his conclusion as a way of *framing* his essay, another strategy modeled in the mentor texts we had read. Kristoffer also includes a haunting line that inspired the title of this article:

The school days are almost over, the days are not as gray as before, the only thing that makes them gray are the things I cannot say. I feel that I should be who I really am, do what I like and try to recover my confidence and thus try to keep that giant window from ever closing again the curtains.

This college application essay is evidence of the confidence emergent bilinguals can acquire as both learners and individuals after participating in inquiry-based activities. It also prompts the realization that this young man’s “utterly unique” story, one that only Kristoffer could tell, is just as memorable as any of the narratives that we studied in class.

AND THEY AROSE

Students speak from powerful personal experience. Kristoffer and his fellow Achieve students traveled from China, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Iran,

Russia, and the Philippines, stowed in tightly packed trunks of cars like cargo; bundled in black trash bags at night to prevent coyotes from catching their scent; washed away by angry currents with mothers who held tightly to their hands; haunted by the indignities suffered during long, treacherous boat rides on forbidding seas; forever scarred by being appeased with gingerbread cookies after the terror of watching Border Patrol agents hold a gun to their mother’s head. They fled bullets, crime, poverty, abuse, and the loneliness of being left behind by parents seeking a better life in America.

Some of my students came to be reunited with mothers they hadn’t seen in over a decade only to find they had been replaced by more favored siblings born legally in the United States, or were met by strangers who eventually betrayed their trust. Some arrived carrying visas—or nothing at all. They came primarily to get an education, often working forty hours a week or spending long hours caring for siblings so that other family members could earn a living, sometimes struggling to learn English by watching television shows.

And then, maybe not as dramatically but just as surely as any fictional character such as Crane’s “youth” or Twain’s Huckleberry Finn, my students arose through transformative inquiry-based experiences that changed their thinking about themselves as learners and individuals. They arose to navigate integrated classes like ERWC that even English speakers find challenging, to move from lowering their eyes and reluctantly offering “dead fish” handshakes when we played *Meet the Boss* at the beginning of the year, to standing tall and making eye contact while confidently participating in integrated ERWC group presentations.

My students arose to go to prom; to sign yearbooks; to sing “Happy Birthday” to each other in world languages such as Spanish, Russian, and Persian; to meet with our school’s career coach; to attend tours of our local community college; to submit Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and California Dream Act forms; to walk as graduates in caps and gowns, proudly wearing our high school colors of red and black; and to write thank-you notes to teachers on whiteboards like the one neatly

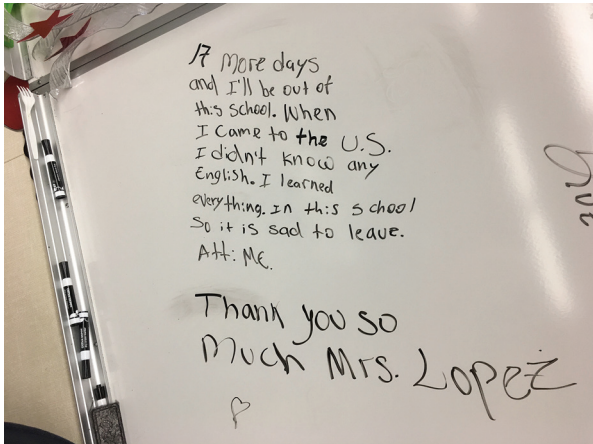


FIGURE 2

Although anonymous, a student candidly shares his gratitude and learning experience. Photo courtesy of the author. Used with permission from the author.

printed sideways on mine (see Figure 2). The latter message was written anonymously by a student: “17 mere days left and I will be out of this school. When I came to the US I didn’t know any English. I learned everything in this school so it is sad to leave. Thank you so much Mrs. Lopez.”

Despite my joy at witnessing my Achieve students’ accomplishments and excitement as I anticipate the bright futures they so deserve, I too am

sad, sad to see real heroes leave, heroes who have inspired and honored me by entrusting me with their thoughts. In response, I find that I, their English teacher, am left pondering the things *I* cannot say. **EJ**

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READWRITETHINKCONNECTION Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

Today’s high school students must market their experiences, skills, achievements, and accolades to set themselves apart from others when applying to college or for a job. This lesson takes students through the steps of creating an effective resume and cover letter using an online publication tool. <https://bit.ly/3wHARzU>

HEIDI SAENZ

“Beyond the Bubble I Was In”: Teaching from Our Stories

A teacher interweaves fiction with her personal narrative to challenge her students’ perspectives about the people of Latin America and US Latinx communities.

*La Herradura, El Salvador
16 de marzo de 1999*

Viaje. Mis padres empezaron a usar esa palabra hace más o menos un año: “un día vas a hacer un viaje para estar con nosotros. Como una aventura. . . .”

Viaje esto, viaje aquello. Viaje, viaje, viaje. Puedo sentir El Viaje en las plantas de mis pies. Lo veo en mis sueños.

—JAVIER ZAMORA, *SOLITO: MEMORIAS*

*La Herradura, El Salvador
March 16, 1999*

Trip. My parents started using that word about a year ago—“one day, you’ll take a trip to be with us. Like an adventure. . . .”

Trip this, trip that. Trip trip trip. I can feel the trip in the soles of my feet. I see it in my dreams.

—JAVIER ZAMORA, *SOLITO: A MEMOIR*



On the first day of school, I stood in front of my new eleventh-grade, Advanced Placement (AP) students and informed them that we would be doing “a lot of reading in this class.”

However, before I shared *our* class reading list with them, I invited them to share their own reading lists of the previous few years with me.

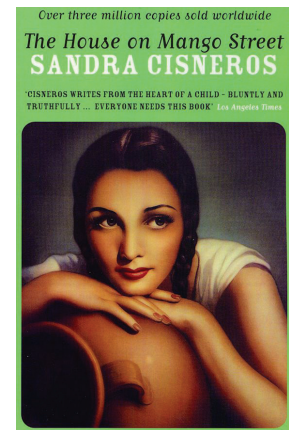
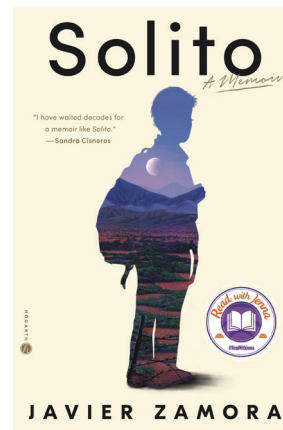
One by one they began to list the authors: Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Austen . . .

After listening to their lists, I wrote my own on the whiteboard:

Cisneros	Wright	Rivera
Morrison	Hurston	Alvarez
Walker	Allende	Lahiri
García Márquez	Hughes	Alexie . . .
Tan	Ellison	

I then asked my students how many had read five of these authors (or the titles I linked to them). *Four? Three? Two?* A few hands went up. *One?* . . . Finally, a few more of my students raised their hands at the mention of *The House on Mango Street*.

I arrived at a new, predominantly White, affluent, elite, private school in the northern suburbs of



Houston, Texas, in August 2015. I was the first and only faculty member in the high school who identified as Latina. Therefore, I was not surprised by the reading list I'd inherited. But after the first day with my AP students, I knew the list had to be updated. Because forms of exclusion persist in the literary studies our students experience in US classrooms, as English language arts (ELA) educators, we have the responsibility to present literature that is representative of various voices and identities and to decenter the dominant narrative (#DisruptTexts; Ebarvia).

THE BACKSTORY

Reflecting on my students and my inherited list of works as well as looking back on my own story made me realize the need to diversify and make changes in the literature I taught.

In 1984, my family and I traveled from El Salvador to the United States. As a six-year-old, undocumented immigrant child, I found my voice through books. I was already a voracious reader when I arrived in the US, and despite not speaking English, or perhaps because I couldn't communicate in the language of my peers, books became one of my escapes from hiding in the shadows as an undocumented immigrant. Books also saved me from becoming another clichéd, negative statistic from a demeaned low-income Latinx neighborhood. Reading was also, according to my parents, our ticket to the American dream.

As a little girl, I lived at the public library; the librarians knew my siblings and me well. I also lived vicariously through the antics of Kristy, Stacey, Mary Anne, and Claudia of the *Baby-Sitter's Club* series, and later Elizabeth and Jessica from *Sweet Valley High*. Their little lives were my dream, but not a reality I could *actually* imagine. Their somewhat privileged, White, and suburban voices did not fit my immigrant, Brown, underprivileged, and silenced voice. Still, I read on and on because reading was my lifeline, and *these* were the books available to me.

And then came the canon. I knew my AP students' list well: Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Austen . . .

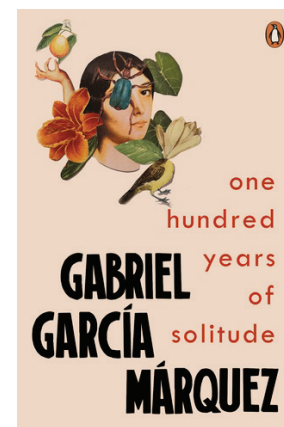
While a secondary school student, I found myself engrossed in Hester's life and Gatsby's drama; I laughed at Elizabeth Bennet's comical romance with Mr. Darcy and felt for Lucie Manette, who had to take care of her father. The majority of the authors were White men, but at least I could relate to their characters, if remotely. Hester's misunderstood and ridiculously sacrificial life and Gatsby's unattainable dreams compelled me to wonder about love and about my own dreams. Then, all of a sudden, in *my* very own AP English Language and Composition class, Esperanza and Jing-Mei came into my life. In the writings of Sandra Cisneros, I saw girls of color like me, and in Amy Tan's characters, I was captivated

by hearing the voices of girls from other cultures trying to assimilate into the American mainstream, just as I had tried to do my entire life.

My new students were *not* like me. But that didn't mean they couldn't benefit, shouldn't benefit, from an inclusive reading list of many authors and of people like me. In fact, insulated in their small bubble, where else would my students meet people like me?

Enter *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez.

My new students were *not* like me. But that didn't mean they couldn't benefit, shouldn't benefit, from an inclusive reading list of many authors and of people like me.



TRAVELS TO MACONDO

Before our novel study, my students experienced a nonfiction narrative by García Márquez: his 1982 Nobel Prize acceptance speech. In it, he offers a brief history of Latin America, and specifically Central America, that is filled with exile and death. The startling statistics about El Salvador’s immigrants continue to jump out at me each year my students read García Márquez’s speech. As he describes the catastrophe of war, Márquez notes,

We have not had a moment’s rest. . . . There have been five wars and seventeen military coups; there emerged a diabolic dictator who is carrying out, in God’s name, the first Latin American ethnocide of our time. . . . Because they tried to change this state of things, nearly two hundred thousand men and women have died throughout the continent, and over one hundred thousand have lost their lives in three small and ill-fated countries of Central America: Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. . . .

Since 1979, the civil war in El Salvador has produced almost one refugee every twenty minutes. The country that could be formed of all the exiles and forced emigrants of Latin America would have a population larger than that of Norway. (“Gabriel García Márquez: Nobel Lecture”)

The introduction of García Márquez’s work to my AP English Literature and Composition class left me full of questions and lofty ambitions for them: How in the world (pun totally intended) was I going to get my students to gain an understanding of the phenomena and violence of war, exiles, and forced immigration? Our readings needed to cause a paradigm shift in their mental status quo that would make them question the stereotypical, and oftentimes prejudiced, ideas they maintained about Latin America and the people of the Américas. Was it possible to break through those misconceptions in our study of magical realism and a novel?

Within a week, my students read the following passage from García Márquez’s novel:

War, in fact, had broken out three months before. Martial law was in effect in the whole country. The only one who knew it immediately was Don Apolinar Moscote, but he did not give the news even to his wife while the army platoon that was to occupy the town by surprise was on its way. They entered

noiselessly before dawn, with two pieces of light artillery drawn by mules, and they set up their headquarters in the school. A 6 p.m. curfew was established. A more drastic search than the previous one was undertaken, house by house, and this time they even took farm implements. They dragged out Dr. Noguera, tied him to a tree in the square, and shot him without any process of law. (100)

My students’ eyes passed along the page; they nodded their heads in acknowledgement that war was happening in the imaginary town of Macondo. Despite the graphic details of war, they moved along in what seemed like passive, unaffected reading. I thought, *I need to go teach public school. I need to teach students who can understand, connect, and relate.* But then, who would challenge these students’ ingrained perspectives and unsettle their views and opinions?

High school students are book-smart and intuitive; my students, given their privileged educational position, knew the advanced vocabulary in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. They could identify and enjoy the literary elements of magical realism, but the words had little impact because of their limited worldviews. Thus they could read but could not engage with the text. The depiction of the war was not translating. My students knew, through isolated lines in their world history books, about the wars that have occurred in Latin America, but they could not understand how these wars ravaged countries and people. Beyond what they heard from their parents and media sound bites, they could not conceptualize why people immigrate to the United States or how US foreign policy destabilizes livelihoods, removes resources, and drives families north.

To make greater connections between literature and the human condition, we paused from García Márquez’s story, and I began to narrate my story, in my voice.

BEGINNINGS IN EL SALVADOR

Civil war broke out in El Salvador in 1978, the year I was born. By the spring of 1982, when I was three years old, the epicenter was Perquín, my father’s native town. Similar to García Márquez’s description, guerrilla forces came “noiselessly” in the night and went house to house to set up quarters. Dissenters

were dragged out of their homes and shot in front of the church, their bodies left to rot for everyone to understand the message. My father and other able-bodied men were taken by force to work for them in the mountains. My mother and other women were made to cook for the guerrilla forces and wash their clothing. A few months before, within a few miles, the greatest massacre in Latin America's history had occurred at El Mozote, when the army killed over 800 civilians (Orr).

My family narrowly escaped the massacre because my father ran away; and one morning, my father, my mother (who was pregnant), my younger brother, and I stood in front of a firing squad when we tried to leave Perquín, which had been commandeered by guerrilla forces blocking the only entry and exit point from el pueblo. The guerrilla leader in charge told my father he could let all of our family go, but my father had to stay. My father had already spent days digging trenches for the rebel forces, so he told the leader he would either have to let us all pass or shoot us all on the spot. The man let us pass.

Similar to García Márquez's Colonel Gerineldo Márquez, who "was the first to perceive the emptiness of the war" (161), my father told me years later that he, too, realized on that day that the war was pointless.

CHALLENGING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Now I had my students' attention. They were engaged. The questions began. We reread the García Márquez passage.

Kathryn asked, "Does it really happen that way? It really happened to you? To your family?" (Student names are pseudonyms.)

This was my *in*, I now realized, as my students began to think about their reading. They moved beyond literary and rhetorical analysis, which are significant skills for success in the AP classroom, to thinking critically about social situations and injustice. The fictitious stories of the Buendías and of the wars that ravaged García Márquez's imaginary Macondo became a reality for them as their Brown,

once-undocumented immigrant, Latina teacher stood before them as a real character in a real story. Fiction met nonfiction.

I witnessed an opening of their minds through the questions about their preconceived notions regarding our Américas and their inhabitants across time and geographies.

As an ELA teacher, I am committed to my students, especially to those who could benefit from expanding their awareness and gain knowledge through the study of diverse literatures. To illustrate, around the same time that year, in 2015, one of my juniors asked what part of Mexico I was from. I responded that I was from El Salvador, in Central America.

"Oh! My nanny and my maid are from El Salvador," Luke shared.

In Luke's life, the contributions of Latinx people (or at least Salvadorean women such as me) consisted of domestic labor. His perception was based on his daily experiences. To date, in Hollywood and other media, Latinx characters still continue to appear as criminals, gangsters, and housekeepers.

We paused our lesson to learn about geography: there are at least 20 Spanish-speaking countries south of Mexico to the tip of Cape Horn. Latin American countries and the United States share agreements and dependence in economy, politics, education, medicine, science and engineering, and sports. My students were surprised; their fixed notions were shaken and they began to see more worlds anew.

Beside García Márquez's fictitious narrative of Latin American history, I weaved the stories about my mother on her "expedition" (11) walking with four small children through the deserts of northern Mexico "almost without speaking . . . like sleepwalkers through a universe of grief" (11), having left behind everything she knew, and then crossing the river into Baja California "towards the invisible north" (11), into the unknown. Stories can connect students with familiar faces and help them discern when the media or other communications only tell half-truths. Stories about immigrants can humanize Latin American people, rather than present them in negative or singular views. False stories and

propaganda continue today as many more migrants flee the cruelties, deaths, and difficult conditions in their native countries as my family did.

THE IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

Students need to read and understand the everyday stories of why people flee their countries. In September 2017, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program—a

government relief program that protects eligible immigrants who came to the United States as children from deportation—once again made the news when the Trump administration announced its decision to end the program. One of my seniors, Mike, asked me in class one day what I thought about the issue. I shared with my students that I could easily have been

Several students’ mental status quo had been challenged through the study of García Márquez’s narrative and my own. The stories had served as a catalyst for exploring their misconceptions about Latin American people.

one of the children being told to return to my country of birth, a place completely unfamiliar to me because the only home I knew was in the United States.

Later that fall, the US government teacher assigned his class to write on a compelling issue. Through a comment he made to me, I discovered that several students’ mental status quo had been challenged through the study of García Márquez’s narrative and my own. The stories had served as a catalyst for exploring their misconceptions about Latin American people. Many students chose to write their state representatives and US senators in support of DACA, with my story as evidence.

Aside from the close reading activities, the essential questions, and the essays meant to develop my students’ skills for their exams in AP English Language and Composition and AP English Literature and Composition, promising results came from selecting texts by Latinx writers, discussing the context and humanity surrounding characters, sharing my personal narrative, and inviting students into the fictional and everyday worlds of their neighbors in the hemispheric Américas.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORIES

Not every teacher may have personal narratives to make their students’ readings come alive, but every teacher can diversify the study of literature in their ELA classrooms. We need educator stories that reveal the reading of literature both as an intellectual exercise and also for understanding. But while we may not all share stories like mine that include violence, loss, and hardship, we all have a story.

We have stories of overcoming loss.

We have stories of struggle and stories of success.

We have the responsibility to welcome stories that educate and make sure our students think and understand that reading a story is about making connections, gaining emotional responses, and building a greater knowledge base and a larger worldview.

As ELA teachers, we can sometimes doubt our lesson plans and reading lists. Nonetheless, I am convinced of the work of literature and society in the lives of students. For instance, in June 2020 I received a text from Logan that read:

PS: we need to talk more about this in person, but just to let you know . . . the work you [did] at school is so important. Looking back, it’s clear that you were intentional about having us read books other than those written by White dudes. Gabriel García Márquez, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Lorraine Hansberry . . . you even let me read Malcolm X for outside reading—at our school!

Anyways, thanks for giving me more than just *The Great Gatsby*. Those classes were so foundational to me. Thank you!

Students often reach out to me for book recommendations that are “diverse and full of color like *100 Years*.” Even at their college graduations, former students share that the readings from our class inspired them to do work in social justice and community engagement learning.

Teachers interested in inclusion of more diverse literature that represents the immigrant experiences of Latin Americans and US Latinx communities would benefit from the texts listed in Table 1, several of which I have recommended to my students.

A teacher’s influence is hard to know. Sometimes, however, we get a glimpse—such as the time I was nominated for an award by Jacob, a former

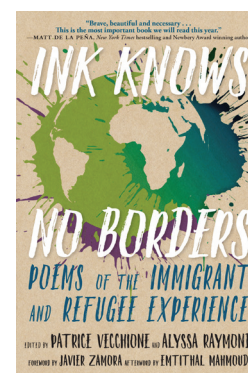


TABLE 1
Recommended Texts, Genres, and Guiding Questions

Text	Genre	Guiding Questions
<i>In the Time of the Butterflies</i> by Julia Alvarez	Historical novel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes a person risk everything for justice or a cause? • How can stories from different places and times also be about me?
<i>We Are Not from Here</i> by Jenny Torres Sanchez	Novel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Torres Sanchez's writing hook and hold you as a reader? • How are boundaries created, and by whom? • Who determines who belongs?
<i>Solito: A Memoir</i> by Javier Zamora	Memoir/ autobiography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does reading Zamora's account affect your thinking about the current immigration system of the United States? • Why do people create narratives based on their experiences? Who can tell their stories best?
<i>We Had Our Reasons: Poems by Ricardo Ruiz and Other Hard-working Mexicans from Eastern Washington</i> by Ricardo Ruiz et al.	Poetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the poems contribute to your understanding of the immigrant experience? • Which poems stand out or connect experiences of laboring people?
<i>Citizen Illegal</i> by José Olivarez	Poetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is poetry? Given your definition, would you classify <i>Citizen Illegal</i> as poetry? • How does Olivarez's poetry guide you to visualize the people in his poems and also to hear their voices and perspectives? • Who is legal or illegal, or how can we humanize people?
<i>Tesoro</i> by Yesika Salgado	Poetry; poetry by women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to be "from" a place? • How do Salgado's mixed identities contribute to your understanding of the Latinx experience of growing up in the United States?
<i>Ink Knows No Borders: Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience</i> , edited by Patrice Vecchione and Alyssa Raymond	Poetry anthology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a border? • How do the poems create a different meaning of the idea of borders or borderlands for you? • What are some ways we silence individuals? • What happens when people are silenced or affirmed?

These works represent the Latin American immigrant and US Latinx experiences in a variety of genres.

student, for challenging his thinking. In his nomination essay, he wrote:

As the child of parents who immigrated to America and worked multiple jobs to make ends meet, Ms. Saenz brought this perspective into our predominantly White suburban Texas school. She brought this perspective into our readings and conversations as well, helping my brother and I realize how dangerous it can be to live in a bubble of ignorance.

She explained to me the privilege that allowed me to feel that way, and she opened my eyes to see beyond the bubble I was in.

However, in the spring of 2022, I realized that our students need to be exposed to these influential stories much earlier in their coming of age. My daughter, Valentina, an avid young reader at age nine, called out from the car’s back seat, “Can I read to you, Mami?”

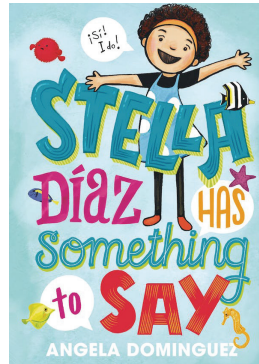
“Sure, watcha reading?” I responded. (Reading is a common practice by my children on our drives.)

“*Stella Díaz Has Something to Say*. OK, listen,” she continued.

“Mami, Stella says,” and here Valentina pauses to reiterate that the character says *mami* and not *mommy*.

She adds that Stella tells her mami she wants to buy quesadillas, but the sweet Salvadorean ones that her abuela makes, not the Mexican ones with cheese and tortillas (Dominguez). And then Valentina cries out, “¡Mami! She’s half Salvadorean, just like me! ¡Es como yo!”

In the driver’s seat, I am overcome with emotion because Valentina sees someone like herself. She sees the Brown, immigrant character I never saw until my high school years.



As ELA teachers, we need to be providing these opportunities more frequently because the literature in our lives can tell a story that connects with our students, their worlds, and the next generation. We can embrace our Americas and the people who are our neighbors by giving voice to their stories while sharing our very own. **EJ**

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

As a class, students evaluate a nonfiction or realistic fiction text for its cultural relevance to themselves personally and as a group. They first write about a story that they identify with and share their responses as a group. As a class, they then analyze the cultural relevance of a selected text using an online tool. After completing this full-class activity, students search for additional, relevant texts; each student chooses one and writes a review of their chosen text. Selected texts can be any nonfiction or realistic fiction pieces—books, documentaries, television programs, and films—and students are encouraged to choose texts that are personally relevant to themselves and their peers. <http://bit.ly/3Hi7Rng>

**Redux**

I don't want to give words
to what happened.

She was and is so much
more than that moment,
on that day that lives
in heads.

I will never forget
the day after, her crying
in my classroom.

I wish I had control
of time, go back
well before my mind
connected the dots.

Well before another student,
came into my classroom days later,
closed the door,

and turned dots to pointillism.

She needs help,
they said.

I wish I could throw acetone
on the whole thing.

Take away those 17 hours
in between my seventh-period class on the day before
and my first-period class on the morning after.

I wish I didn't have to watch her voice disappear.
I wish she didn't have to remember even more.

Once filled pages
in her class note-

book slowly emptied
over time.

She showed up
less and less,
and even then,

only in pieces.

Once filled pages,
disappearing.

I gave her the grade she had
before it happened, and not
the one that withered away
like fallen eucalyptus leaves

waiting for fire.

—VERNON (TREY) KEEVE III

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HOLLY SPINELLI

Writing beyond Borders: Latinx Voices in World Literature

Students' input and identities are prioritized to cocreate a culturally responsive world literature course.

In *We Got This: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be*, Cornelius Minor asserts, “Before our kids are students, they are people” (107). He emphasizes the importance of humanizing our students as whole people with stories, identities, and experiences that intersect within and beyond our classrooms. This idea crystallized for me in the fall of 2020, when I left my previous district and started teaching at Monroe-Woodbury High School in Orange County, New York. A major reason for my transition to the district was the high school English language arts department’s commitment to provide culturally responsive (Gay) educational experiences for all students.

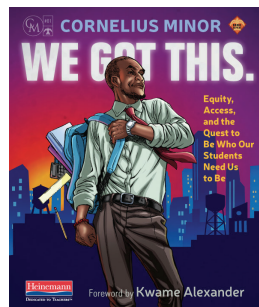
When I received my teaching schedule, one of my assigned courses was a senior-level, one-semester world literature class. I saw its potential to align with Minor’s message and the department’s commitment to centering texts that speak to contemporary young readers and the district’s changing demographics. I envisioned a course where students could explore their own cultures, histories, and identities through self-selected readings and personal-interest research projects.

First, I reviewed the course description. The previous educator’s outline vaguely referenced “classical” global texts, namely Eurocentric texts with predominantly White authors. I wondered how the district’s increasingly Black, Brown, and Latinx student population would

respond to a course that, instead, centered contemporary texts written by living authors. I wondered how they would interact with texts written by people who shared their cultural backgrounds and their stories of migration, immigration, first-generation status, and adolescent experiences in a combination of their home languages and English. I led a conversation with my department chair about how to reimagine the course for and with the students enrolled in it. Thankfully, my department chair shared my vision. Her support to reinvent the course meant that the students and I could cocreate a literary experience where they could see themselves in the course’s central focus on historic and contemporary texts and contexts.

By building a course that would respectfully honor and amplify students’ cultures and experiences, I found a delicate balance between my roles as teacher and learner among the students. I wondered how I could cocreate a learning environment where students felt represented and felt that they belonged. For instance, several students in the class’s first semester self-identified as Mexican or Dominican, and I wanted to ensure that these

students could see themselves reflected in our course literature. A few students self-identified as immigrants, while others shared that they were first-generation Americans. Thus, I aimed to work with them and the high school’s librarians to find texts and authors that centered those identities and experiences, too.

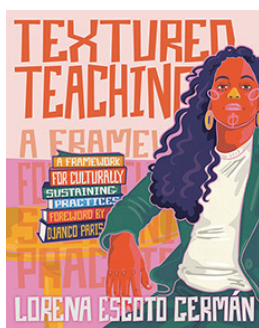


In this article, I describe how I built trust and community among my students through both remote and hybrid learning models in a rural suburb of New York City as we sought to create a class together that represented students' understanding and experience of the Americas and, more broadly, the world. This article will explain the process of this cocreation, as well as the self-directed and designed projects that students created throughout our semester. In addition to collaborating with the school librarians to curate texts to study in the course, students assisted by building creative, self-guided research projects. A common goal we shared for the projects was for the research process and final product to honor and celebrate students' lived experiences as they critically analyzed and discussed texts in weekly book-circle meetings with their peers. As students read their selected texts, they cocreated questions and discussed specific themes, such as cultural identity, while making text-to-self connections.

Last, I present approaches to summative research assessment to demonstrate ways for students to showcase connections among their identities and the course texts. Overall, the projects honor the students as experts with their cultural knowledge and experiences, as well as highlighting their creative approaches to connecting their personal interests to research-based analysis of selected course texts.

COCREATING THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Throughout the first week of class, students engaged in conversations to build their expectations for our virtual classroom environment, assessments, and course content. One of my initial questions for students was how often their input was considered in their learning experiences. Many responded with some variation on “never” or “not really at all.” How can I or other educators expect students to see themselves represented in their learning if their voices are not valued in the process of creating the curriculum? In *Textured Teaching: A Framework for Culturally Sustaining Practices*, Lorena Germán explains,



“De-centering ourselves as teachers is one of the biggest challenges we face,” and she reminds us that “[i]t can happen in layers” (40). I saw this in the difficulties I faced in my own process of unlearning a teacher-centered experience. I struggled to find balance in establishing myself as a trusted educator in a new environment where I was just getting to know my colleagues and where I had not yet met many students.

Thankfully, students openly responded to surveys where they could share their interests and discuss, if they were comfortable doing so, aspects of their identities. One survey included questions about how they would want their cultures, identities, and experiences represented in the world literature course. Questions included:

- What do you think of when you hear “world literature”? How does this influence your interpretation of what this course could be?
- What do you consider some of the most important aspects of your personal/cultural identity? Why?
- What authors, texts, countries, or cultures do you think should be included in a world literature course? Why?
- How would you like to see cultures, histories, and identities represented in our course? What influences your thinking here?

Students responded earnestly. Several Latinx students expressed interest in studying literature with focuses on the borderlands, immigration, and migration. Others explained that their rationale for these focuses related to their families' personal experiences and stories about their movement across borderlands to reach the United States. A group of students shared that they had cultural and familial bonds with Mexico, which influenced the first semester's significant focus on Mexican histories, literature, art, and storytelling.

In later iterations of the course, students shared identities connected to Argentina, Puerto Rico,

Cuba, Haiti, and Ecuador. Non-Latinx-identifying students expressed interest in learning more about these countries, too.

A few White, non-Latinx students in the first-semester section candidly explained that their interests in these countries and cultures stemmed from

Slowly, the students began to build trust with one another and with me. Their voices filled a majority of our space. They began creating the course content and focus.

recent news coverage of “migration caravans” moving north toward Mexico and the United States. They said they did not know why people would leave their home countries in large groups. Their intentions when expressing interest in the people migrating north may not

have been malicious, but the tension grew, even on the virtual platform, when this observation entered the conversation.

The Latinx students fell silent. A few turned off their cameras and their icons replaced their faces. This was a critical moment for our class community. I interjected with questions about students’ thinking and curiosity regarding the news coverage they saw to ensure that inquiry, not judgment or hatred, was the driving force behind learning more about the people, their cultures, and their countries. Some Latinx students put their cameras back on, and the tension eased slightly, but not completely.

Following several small-group and whole-class discussions over the course of a few class periods, three Latinx students’ cameras remained off. However, they did participate by unmuting to speak and sharing ideas in the class chat. Eventually, most students identified areas in the Américas as the central focus for the semester, and others chose countries spanning Europe, Asia, and Africa.

The surveys and conversations provided a starting point for students to center their identities, interests, and inquisitive approaches to the learning they wanted to engage in during our course. Slowly, the students began to build trust with one another and with me. Their voices filled a majority of our space. They began creating the course content and focus.

ESTABLISHING CHOICE AND STUDENT VOICE

Creating a cocurated text library was an idea that emerged as I reflected on the conversation I’d had with my department chair about the course’s recreation. I truly wanted it to be student-centered, which meant that my positionality as a White educator born and raised in the United States did not grant me sole authority over the course content and how students would demonstrate their learning. I felt that this course’s success relied on trusting students’ input. This would prove to be challenging, especially since the first semester of classes started remotely.

No matter what texts students selected, centering their interests and the connections they saw between the texts and their own lives was a priority, because I strongly believe that “[r]egardless of how students are reading, teachers should put care into making sure that what they are reading comes from a diverse and inclusive selection of texts” (Germán 34). Students took the time to get to know one another in the class, and they were doing their best to ask questions in ways that demonstrated respect for each other.

Celia, an inquisitive student, asked her classmate Lindsay, while unmuted in a small virtual breakout room, “I don’t mean to be rude, but where is that [location] and what do you mean when you say your family left [their country] because of ‘military problems?’” (Student names are pseudonyms.) Lindsay politely explained that her family was from a small town in Mexico near the Texas border, and that her family had come to the United States to seek safety and more economic opportunities. The conversation then gravitated toward identifying texts that could relate to the students and their families’ experiences.

Once students’ interests were established, we spent a few class days discussing text options from my classroom library. I shared the texts’ covers and summaries, and read passages from the texts to familiarize students with them. Without prompting, a student named Ian searched for authors’ websites and social media pages. He unmuted and excitedly shared, “Noé Álvarez has a *Twitter* page! You can follow him!” The next week, the high school librarians joined us in our virtual classroom to provide students

with a tutorial for using the school's library database to find texts that matched their interests. Students created a shared class document for anyone interested in studying a mixture of historical and contemporary contexts of Mexico that included texts by authors like Noé Álvarez, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Socorro Venegas.

APPROACHES TO LEARNING AND TEXT SELECTION

Once students established their primary focus, it was important to approach *how* students and I would engage with our selected works. Students are intellectual beings; they are, at *all* learning levels, capable of envisioning a pathway to learning that works well for them. Risk-taking and curiosity cannot simply remain intangible platitudes that we fail to model for our students. If we want students to truly succeed in becoming lifelong learners and “the next generation of [innovative] thinkers,” we “need to create a space of intellectualism where students see themselves as the next generation of thinkers” (Muhammad 113). I modeled this by letting the students direct their learning.

Students identified how they preferred to approach learning about the literature, art, and storytelling from each country they had selected. Initially, students were hesitant when their peers suggested working in pairs or small groups; they wanted to work alone. A small group expressed discomfort with the prospect of working with peers they did not know. Others felt uneasy when speaking aloud over a virtual platform. One suggestion was for students to create shared documents and use the chat function on the documents to communicate with one another. Following a short tutorial to familiarize students with these online features, several students who wanted to work alone opted to work with a partner. Two students continued to work independently, because that is what they identified as the best model for them in the virtual learning situation.

Whether students worked independently, in pairs, or in small groups, they created *Google* documents as their primary note-taking and communication hubs. The next step was to have students choose

the texts of focus and to offer them assistance with finding reliable information and authentic voices for the histories, stories, and literature they wanted to explore. Students came up with these approaches:

- They wanted to include personal narratives, such as interviews with family members about their lived experiences and their country's cultural histories.
- They asked to work with the school librarians to find contemporary literature written by authors from the countries they researched.
- They opted to explore my classroom library for texts that center voices, histories, cultures, and stories from these countries.

Setbacks such as internet unreliability, students being unable to attend class regularly because they fell ill or had to tend to family members who were sick, students not being able to pick up physical texts from the school during the specified days and times, and the genuine screen fatigue students experienced while remote learning occurred throughout the semester. However, each student was eventually able to read, take notes, and share opinions on texts and resources to which they felt connected. Three students interviewed family members and recorded their stories for the class to hear. Some groups chose texts from our classroom library and had family members or neighbors pick them up from the school. Others used our school library's digital platform, *Sora*, to read texts on their electronic devices. Students were also encouraged to consider their own lived experiences as texts. Excerpts from a variety of students' and my cocurated library of texts eventually served as the foundation for their assessment.

In semesters that followed, students created book circles where they read a shared text and presented their interpretations of and cultural connections to the authors' and texts' main characters, concepts, and ideas. The students identified themselves in connection to places and people in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, and Guatemala. Students read their selected text, and over the course of the semester,

they presented small excerpts to study and share in Socratic seminars and gallery walks.

STUDENT CHOICE AND TEXT ANALYSIS

The students’ selected texts reflected a multitude of voices, including the LGBTQIA+ community as well as those who speak multiple languages and incorporate facets of authentic, multilingual written and visual forms within their works. Though the list was certainly not exhaustive, it was one that represented and was shaped by the students (see Table 1).

The texts and resources spanned various time periods, genres, topics, and lengths. For instance, the memoir *Spirit Run: A 6,000-Mile Marathon through North America’s Stolen Land* by Noé Álvarez is over 200 pages long, while short stories in *Sudden Fiction Latino* vary in length from one paragraph to a few pages. *Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol* is a nonlinear, graphic text that required

some prerecording and viewing options so students could see the entire text on screen. Students were not always familiar with the materials they found, but they agreed that based on their interactions with them, these texts and resources felt “important” and “like the right ones” for their and their peers’ exploration and learning, especially when bridging contemporary and historical contexts.

Once students compiled a list of texts and resources—a list that could grow throughout our time together as a class—they generated a list of themes and topics they wanted to explore within these texts and resources. Students expressed interests in:

1. Identity
2. Culture
3. History
4. Misinformation/misunderstandings
5. Personal/social/political commentary

The students chose to read and review all texts and excerpts together in class, with the small groups or individual students studying the texts leading class discussions and writing activities. The class asked to have the texts and excerpts posted in our virtual classroom. They wanted to familiarize themselves with the readings before we met and discussed them together. To keep the conversations connected to and meaningful for their interests and experiences, we agreed that each class meeting would ask students to form questions or to respond to prompts in student-selected categories (see Table 2).

Throughout the semester, students asked me to review their text choices. I agreed to offer some input, but not to be the final decision-maker. I reiterated to the students that they were in control of their learning. Students acknowledged this, but they, too, struggled with decentering a teacher’s input. If a

TABLE 1
Student-Curated Text Selections

Text Title and Author	Genre	Themes
<i>The Poet X</i> by Elizabeth Acevedo	Contemporary/poetry	Coming of age, sexuality, familial struggles
<i>In the Time of the Butterflies</i> by Julia Alvarez	Historical fiction	Resistance, authoritarianism, sisterhood
<i>Spirit Run: A 6,000-Mile Marathon through North America’s Stolen Land</i> by Noé Álvarez	Nonfiction/memoir	Immigration, first-generation Indigenous culture
<i>Krik? Krak!</i> by Edwidge Danticat	Short stories	Political prosecution, intellectual freedom, migration
<i>I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i> by Erika L. Sánchez	Young adult fiction/novel	Identity, mental health, family
<i>We Are Not from Here</i> by Jenny Torres Sanchez	Contemporary / young adult novel	Escape, survival, US-Mexico borderlands

Students curated these text selections for their book-circle groups.

TABLE 2
Student-Generated Writing Prompts

Category	Question(s)	Purpose
Background	What is the author’s background and the text’s history? Why are these significant to our understanding of the text?	These questions provide entry points to ground a text in cultural, historical, and social time, place, and space.
Craft	What do you notice about the writer’s craft, such as word choice and use of literary devices?	Students can use these questions to actively analyze the author’s message and intentions.
Representation	What/who is present or absent from this text? Why is this important for readers to identify?	These questions highlight which voices are prominent or marginalized in a text, as well as how the authenticity therein shapes the readers’ understanding of the ways key aspects of identity (such as race, gender, culture, religion, sexuality, and socioeconomic status) are presented.
Structure	How does the text’s structure affect meaning and the reader’s interpretation of it?	Students have found these questions helpful for tracking and organizing connections and information presented in the text.

Students identified specific categories and crafted questions within them to sharpen their text analysis.

student asked me, “Do you think this is a good text?” I replied, “Do you mean a good text-fit for your and your group’s interests? What is your group’s central focus, and does this book’s description align with it?” Students and I agreed to have conversations about the texts, but that the students would have the final say in which ones would work best for them.

After texts were selected, a strategy that worked well for the group to read and analyze them in the online platform was a technique adapted from the Hudson Valley Writing Project. Students selected *golden lines* from the text, which are lines that stand out to readers for reader-selected reasons, and wrote about them together in dialectical journals. Some included lines that reflected strong writing craft. Others chose lines specifically positioned with the author’s presentation of or comment on cultural practices. Lindsay said she chose lines from “The Laughter of White Lilies” by Socorro Venegas because “they sounded cool,” and she wanted to know if her peers shared her interest in the author’s use of metaphor.

Next, students responded to each other’s rationales with questions to guide them in learning more

about each other’s thinking. They asked questions like:

- Why did you choose this excerpt or text?
- What are your personal connections to it (if any)?
- What aspect of the text are you choosing to study? Craft? Voice? Theme? Why?
- What do you want us [the audience] to know or understand after we read this?

Students held discussions in the virtual classroom chat box. They unmuted more frequently as the semester went on. This process was not always smooth; sometimes there were long pauses or only a few students engaging with the work at various points, but overall, the students gravitated toward completing the work and engaging with the lessons, because they helped create them.

Overall, the students gravitated toward completing the work and engaging with the lessons, because they helped create them.

STUDENT-TEACHER ASSESSMENTS

Senior-level semester English language arts courses at my school have a research requirement, so the world literature students collectively brainstormed ideas for theirs. I presented a writing prompt to begin their thought process: *If you could choose a final assessment that showcased your educational strengths while also including research, what would that look like and why?* Students were encouraged to approach the research in ways that centered themselves, their culture(s), and what they hoped to learn about themselves and each other. In the midst of discussion, one student suggested modeling their projects as mini-versions of the texts we read together in class. The class immediately liked the idea and opted for research projects that would demonstrate their findings beyond the traditional research paper. Their suggestions included autoethnographic and hands-on research projects.

NONFICTION: CRAFTING A MINI-MEMOIR OR AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Mara and Jay were inspired by Noé Álvarez’s memoir, *Spirit Run: A 6,000-Mile Marathon through North America’s Stolen Land*. They expressed an interest in interviewing family members and viewing photographs and other familial artifacts to learn more about their families’ histories and migration stories. They wanted to document and share their family histories and reflect on how their families and cultures influenced their personal identities. Students were invited to share their work in English and in any home language they felt comfortable including.

In response to interest in the US-Mexico borderlands, Lindsay presented excerpts from the interview she conducted with her mother about her mother’s journey from Mexico to the United States (see Figure 1). Her peers listened intently, and the conversation dismantled some of the negative misconceptions about the borderlands and those attempting to cross into the United States.

EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH: ART AND JOURNEYS

A small group wanted a hands-on research project option. These students opted to create drawings, paintings, collages, music videos, and traditional

...My grandfather and my grandmother went with my mom to the bus stop. While waiting for the bus, my grandparents were all in tears, along my mother. The last words from her dad was: “Cuidate mucho, te amo mucho, estaré orando por ti y tus hermanos todos los días y rezaré para que estés a salvo cuando llegues. Y el día que quieras volver, no me encontrarás vivo” (Take care of yourself so much, I will be praying for you and your siblings, also pray that you will go over there safely. The day you want to come back, you won’t see me living). The reason why he said that, his daughter is going to the United States. She will never come back, she will be accomplishing her dreams.

I love to share my mother’s story because I want people to know that not all immigrants are bad people or “criminals” as the news say[s]..I’m definitely proud of my mother and happy to be a daughter of two hard working immigrants-- and grateful for everything my mother has done for my sister and me.

FIGURE 1
Lindsay’s autoethnography, including this interview excerpt, offered her peers a humanizing perspective on her family’s experience of crossing the US-Mexico border.

foods to share the histories, cultures, and experiences of their own cultures across the world.

Ian was interested in exploring his own Indigenous roots and shared a presentation featuring his favorite golden lines from Noé Álvarez’s memoir (see Figure 2). Jennifer, a non-Latinx student, created a photography project in response to Socorro Venegas’s short story “The Laughter of White Lilies.” She expressed a deep appreciation for Venegas’s work, especially after learning from her peers about young women working in Mexico.

CONTINUING TO CULTIVATE LEARNING

Following their presentations, students wrote reflections to share why they chose their specific topic and project; how they approached their research; any struggles they faced and how they overcame them; what they hoped their peers would learn from their project; how this project had improved their understandings of themselves, their families, and their cultures; and what they hoped to continue learning about their topic beyond our class.

Last June marked my fourth semester teaching the world literature course, and each time, different student groups formed new iterations of it—and each one had unique challenges and successes. Looking back, I’m glad I trusted my instinct to meet with my


“I run to find relief and to help activate a power within me, pushing myself hard over hot pavement as if to extinguish flames from my feet.”

This beautiful line can be taken in two ways. In the literal sense, running can be very taxing on the body. After many hours of running, your feet can start hurting and aching and they can start burning as well. But I think Noe here is trying to say that running can help you feel at one with something. Noe is trying to reconnect with his ancestors and running through what used to be the roots of his ancestors can help him with that. Hearing stories along the way from other runners and from those in the city/towns who cheer them along the way. Those can be very great motivators to keep on going.



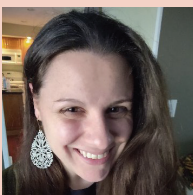
FIGURE 2

Ian reflects on golden lines from a text to show a personal connection.

department chair about creating a culturally responsive world literature course. No matter what, this world literature course is a continual learning experience with increased student engagement rooted in authentic student input. Moving forward, I will continue to center students' input, identities, and interests. Centering students' cultures, identities, and lived experiences—especially those of students in my district's growing Latinx community—has enriched the world literature class participants' understanding of their and their classmates' valuable histories, cultures, stories, and voices across our Américas. 

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

In this lesson, students are encouraged to explore the idea of memory in both large- and small-group settings. Students access their own life experiences and then discuss family stories they have heard. After choosing a family member to interview, students create questions, interview their relative, and write a personal narrative that describes not only the answers to their questions but their own reactions to these responses. These narratives are peer-reviewed and can be published and shared. <http://bit.ly/2VgyNzg>



The Universe of Disconnect

[T]he language of disadvantaged students seems to be arrested. . . .

—JAMES MOFFETT, *TEACHING THE UNIVERSE OF DISCOURSE*

“Teaching the Universe” to a student gasping for air in the pipeline. His name rhymed with things that don’t float, like the bullets that tore holes in his teen-aged body.

Shot four times before the 9th grade.

A “symbolic spectrum” of survival, a failure in getting a student to abstract outside of their reality.

He could only pay attention to his fears and the people who hunted him in the streets for taking.

Oakland is split between the haves and the have nots; some become takers.

The “hierarchies of classes” doesn’t mention anything about the children only given inauthentic discourses.

He said, *I can’t think that way* when tasked with art. Creativity exhausted from staying alive.

He forgot easily, but always remembered to sit facing the door.

“An element in abstraction is selection—constructing in one’s mind . . . the world . . . singling out environmental features and ignoring others.”

Reasoning developed through a phantasmagoria of surviving.

“Linking [his] perception of . . .” places in fear. There is a pipeline with very little breathing room.

What are the costs of holding on to air? “To abstract is to trade a loss of reality for a gain in control.”

Shot 4 times trying to gain control of life.

—VERNON (TREY) KEEVE III
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BOOKS IN REVIEW

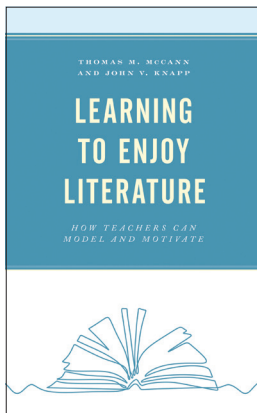
Michelle Zoss, *Column Editor*

A teacher educator explores rhetorical approaches to teaching literature in two recent books.

Approaching Literature Rhetorically

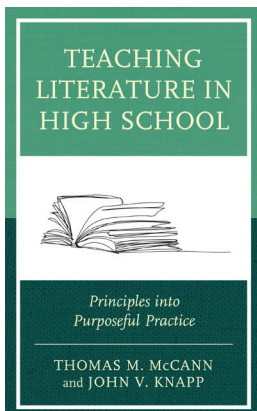
Learning to Enjoy Literature: How Teachers Can Model and Motivate

Thomas McCann and John Knapp.
Rowman and Littlefield, 2021.



Teaching Literature in High School: Principles into Purposeful Practice

Thomas McCann and John Knapp.
Rowman and Littlefield, 2021.



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In June 2022, I went back to school. As a student in James Phelan and Amy Shuman’s Project Narrative summer institute, I joined a dozen other professors and graduate students from across disciplines such as English, rhetoric, communication, and education. Together, we carefully listened as our teachers outlined the roots and the potentials of narrative theory—for better understanding different kinds of stories and for better crafting our own narratives in the classroom and beyond.

Project Narrative is the center of a movement in literary studies known as *rhetorical narratology*. At its core, rhetorical narratology focuses on the communication between author and audience and on the resources that authors and readers deploy to understand one another. This method moves away from familiar approaches to literature that explore narrative as a structure, or as a theme, or as a springboard for personal response. Instead, rhetorical narratology asks us to think of narrative as an action: “somebody telling

somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened” (Phelan, *Somebody Telling Somebody Else* 5).

Emerging from the English department at the University of Chicago, literary scholars in this tradition draw from Aristotle’s *Poetics* to argue that to understand a work of literature, we first begin with its *effects* on us as readers. Did it make us sad? Angry? Confused? Fill us with despair? From here, we work backwards to the *causes* in the story. This approach makes narrative less a static “thing” that we help students dissect and master; rather, narrative is a “rhetorical action”: a “multi-layered purposive communication from author to audience” (Phelan, “The Chicago School” 134). As a way of exploring narrative, rhetorical narratology can offer teachers and students a robust set of thinking tools for better understanding the power of literature for readers and for the world (LeBlanc).

As a teacher educator, I listened attentively during my weeks in Project Narrative and wondered, *What could this approach offer English language arts (ELA) today?* While many teachers, including myself, spend a great deal of time helping our students craft formal

literary arguments in the high school classroom, narrative has become an equally powerful form of persuasion in the contemporary media landscape. *TikTok* videos, first-person *YouTube* lifestyle stories, and expansive *Twitter* threads are powerful narratives and powerful forms of rhetoric. Narrative exploration in the classroom needs its own powerful set of tools for thinking about their effects.

FOSTERING RHETORICAL READING IN CLASSROOMS

Thomas McCann and John Knapp's twin books, *Learning to Enjoy Literature: How Teachers Can Model and Motivate* and *Teaching Literature in High School: Principles into Purposeful Practice*, are not the first to take up the framework of rhetorical narratology for secondary English (see, for example, Smith and Wilhelm). But together, they best balance a clear explanation of the underlying literary theory with a comprehensive set of examples and organizing frameworks for working teachers. Animating these two volumes is an explicit argument that the most common approaches to teaching literature in contemporary ELA classrooms—assigning reading, followed by quizzing, discussion of themes, completing worksheets, etc.—along with a more recent focus on choice and decentralized instruction, are still inadequate. These familiar instructional models, the authors suggest, largely overlook the fundamental need for instructional

scaffolding to support students' understanding of the rhetorical nature of narrative.

“Missing in this dominant routine,” McCann and Knapp point out, “is attention to *teaching students how to read*, especially by demonstrating the discipline of reading complex literary texts and by immersing students in purposeful practice in the procedures for reading such texts” (*Teaching* 2). Our job as teachers, then, is to support students in learning the procedures for engaging complex works of fiction by seeing and hearing the work of the authors communicating through them. This approach to teaching procedures, consequently, requires some sense of how literary texts uniquely make meaning through irony, character voice, juxtaposition, etc.

The solution, McCann and Knapp offer, is to “model for students what an experienced reader of literature notices, interrogates, anticipates, and reflects when reading a literary text” (*Teaching* 39). Because the study of literature involves the “learning of disciplined procedures of constructing meaning from complex texts and evaluating them” (*Learning* 7), we can support students' generation of understanding, explicitly outline the procedures for reading literary text, model how a savvy reader engages literature, and scaffold toward their independence.

The two volumes work best when read in tandem. *Learning to Enjoy Literature* is the first and offers a general organizational framework for students to learn

a disciplinary approach to reading literary texts. Beginning with familiar preparatory activities, *Learning* encourages us to carefully model and practice procedures for close reading of literary texts, supplementing these activities with discussion and student response. This process culminates in providing opportunities for students to write critically about complex literature by engaging competing arguments. *Teaching Literature in High School* follows to provide “explicit activities that make for students' purposeful practice: [r]epeating activities that improve one's mastery of the discipline—that of reading imaginative literature with understanding and enjoyment” (p. vii). If *Learning* provides the destination, *Teaching* provides the guide for how to get there.

FOCUSING ON WHAT READERS DO

Some readers may wonder what makes this approach different from now-familiar think-aloud protocols and reading comprehension strategies (Duke and Pearson), many of which are already embedded in high school classrooms. Whereas those approaches are generally rooted in cognitive science, what sets McCann and Knapp's books apart is a direct engagement with a literary theory and the distinctiveness of literature. Rhetorical narratology is the roadmap for what authors and readers do, and this approach may indeed have more resonance with ELA teachers. Here McCann and Knapp draw explicitly on the work

of Peter Rabinowitz and his indispensable book *Before Reading*. Rabinowitz, himself a graduate of the University of Chicago, outlines in *Before Reading* what he calls the four “rules” that organize narrative and which readers use to work through narrative texts: (1) notice, (2) signification, (3) configuration, and (4) coherence.


In short, readers do the following: find where authors signal that some portions of the literary text are more important than others (notice), make meaning of these noticings (signification), piece together literary structure to anticipate what is to come (configuration), and smooth over discrepancies in the text when it is finished (coherence). Each rule gets attention in McCann and Knapp’s books, but (1) notice and (3) configuration receive the most explicit unpacking, in part because they’re the most easily organized into instruction for students. As someone supporting future high school English teachers, I have found Rabinowitz’s rules and their translation in McCann and Knapp invaluable. Whereas literary narratives are often treated the same as informational texts and mined for names, dates, and events, Rabinowitz’s four-part framework gives teacher candidates a simple,

digestible framework for talking distinctly about literature with their own students.

Where literary theory is often absent or veiled in the high school classroom, rhetorical narratology gives teachers a language to talk about textual features and tools to think about reader engagement.

For working teachers, McCann and Knapp’s contribution is transposing rhetorical narratology onto an organizational framework of lessons and units that enable students to both better enjoy the literature they’re reading and better tackle the next literary work they encounter, long after they’ve left our classrooms. This framework, admittedly, requires a working knowledge of rhetorical approaches to literature—McCann and Knapp are upfront about this issue and outsource a good deal of the theoretical heavy lifting to Phelan and Rabinowitz, asking teachers to read extensively. But where literary theory is often absent or veiled in the high school classroom, rhetorical narratology gives teachers a language to talk

about textual features and tools to think about reader engagement.

Unlike New Critical approaches, which can treat novels and stories as objects frozen in time, rhetorical narratology regards literature as lively communication—communication that may or may not work, with which you may or may not agree, and which you may find ethically beneficial or ethically dubious. By focusing on the *action* of literature, McCann and Knapp renew a focus on what savvy readers *do* when reading narrative text. 

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NWP VOICES

Jennifer S. Dail, *Column Editor*

Leaders from two different National Writing Project sites created a regional network to support their work on a local level.

The Need for Regional Networks

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Teachers need networks. They need to find like-minded colleagues to grow professionally. We all need thinking partners with whom to share ideas, develop teaching strategies, and find new resources. Teachers in larger schools may find colleagues in their own spaces, yet many teachers must reach beyond their own schools and districts to find networks. This is especially true in rural areas, where a teacher might be the only teacher in a grade level or even a specific discipline (Brenner et al.). The *Why*

Rural Matters report revealed that one in six students nationally attends rural schools and that “the national median enrollment for rural districts [is] just 484.5 students” (Showalter 1).

The NCTE network supports 25,000 members with an unlimited number of entrance points. While every teacher can find a community within NCTE, the vast network can be overwhelming. My first NCTE Annual Convention was both wonderful and lonely. The sessions were generative, but the conference was so large that opportunities for engaging in conversations ended up being limited. A state or regional network can shift focus more easily to address local needs or interests, allowing members to share and gather information (Lieberman 226).

Regional networks allow us an entrance into a broader discussion outside of our state boundaries while remaining intimate enough to establish relationships across sites and states. Such networks not only allow educators access to resources they may not have in their local contexts, but they also support educators in viewing

themselves beyond the singular classroom, helping to find growth in leadership or research areas (Niesz 610; Schiff et al.).

THE STORY OF A REGIONAL NETWORK

When we, Rebecca and Ellen, began a series of conversations that connected the National Writing Project sites in the South, we wanted to create a space for local programs to come together to talk, develop strategies, and form new connections in support of teachers across our region. The work began, as many good things do, with two leaders finding commonalities and shared goals. We both work to support rural teachers who face challenges such as systemic under-resourcing and higher rates of teacher turnover. We also knew we were smarter together and that we could help each other be more responsive to the teachers in our areas.

As longtime site directors in the National Writing Project, we knew the value of a network, especially one grounded in the core philosophy of “teachers teaching teachers,” a model in which K–16 educators work together to

advance the teaching of writing. We decided the easiest way to start the network was to begin with a small conference, and we were fortunate to have a model for creating a local network through a regional conference: the National Writing Project Midwest Conference.

Our first NWP in the South Conference was held over a two-day period in March 2019 in Greenville, South Carolina, and was paired with the Upstate Writing Project Spring Conference. The format for our first day provided time and space for this diverse group of National Writing Project directors, teachers, and principals to meet and share their site and classroom challenges and successes. We shared our writing, participated in stimulating discussions, and developed plans to strengthen our individual sites and our network.

After the March 2020 conference was cancelled due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the 2021 virtual conference lit a spark for teachers to return to classrooms with a renewed sense of purpose during a pandemic, and the second virtual conference in spring 2022 reaffirmed how important relationships are as we all focus on our classrooms. As we planned each conference, we intentionally created spaces for teachers to share practices, for site leaders to share programs, and for everyone to engage in deep conversations.

Along with this work, the regional network created an avenue for us to provide connections through professional development

opportunities. Some educators participated in cross-state virtual book studies, while others participated in conference calls during the first year of the pandemic. Those calls provided avenues for site leaders working to support teachers in their classrooms as everyone was trying to determine how best to move forward. Having a community built on shared values gave all of us new ideas.

A NEW SITE DIRECTOR'S STORY

Smaller networks are invaluable for new site directors as they think about the best ways to support teachers in their areas. When we began NWP in the South, Michelle—new to her role as co-director of the National Writing Project of Acadiana—found that networking events provided a time and place for site leaders from the same region to share what they found to be effective and sustainable for their site. Michelle explains, “For our site, NWP in the South offered me, a new co-director, a space to forge connections with other site leaders during a time in which in-person events were not taking place. Through virtual conferences, we shared the work happening at our site, and these gatherings provided a sounding board for ideas we had moving forward. During a time of so much change and uncertainty in education, it could be easy to become discouraged or feel overwhelmed. However, being able to connect with nearby NWP site leaders has been invigorating

and has helped our site to support teachers as writers and instructors of writing.”

Teachers more than ever need opportunities for networking outside of their own institutions to seek new ideas and strengthen collective teacher voices.

LAST THOUGHTS


Opportunities for networking are vital to the profession. As professional development in many states shifts toward in-house models, teachers more than ever need opportunities for networking outside of their own institutions to seek new ideas and strengthen collective teacher voices. We can choose to remain in our individual classrooms, but to grow as educators, we have to leave that space and cross into another, whether by reading a book or having a conversation or finding a local Writing Project site or a national network like NCTE. There are some practical steps that sites or NWP teachers can use to create their own networks:

1. Visit the NWP website and identify other active sites in your region.
2. Reach out to directors of those sites to see who might be interested in collaborating in the development of a regional network.
3. Connect with site directors who are already taking up

this work to discuss successful strategies and potential obstacles.

4. Begin making contacts within the extended network you have identified for your site and developing a collective plan.

Local Writing Project sites and NCTE state affiliates can be the perfect place to begin, and we encourage all educators to find a

professional network in their local area by visiting www.nwp.org or ncte.org/groups/affiliates/. 

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: 2023 DAVID H. RUSSELL RESEARCH AWARD

The David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English recognizes published research in language, literature, rhetoric, teaching procedures, or cognitive processes that may sharpen the teaching or the content of English courses at any level. Any work of scholarship or research in language, literature, rhetoric, or pedagogy and learning published during the past five years (between January 2017 and December 2022) is eligible. Works nominated should be exemplary instances of the genre, address broad research questions, contain material that is accessibly reported, and reflect a project that stands the test of time.

Nomination information can be found on the NCTE website at <http://www.ncte.org/awards/david-h-russell-research-award/>. Nominations must be submitted by **March 1, 2023**. The award will be presented at the NCTE Awards Ceremony associated with the Annual Convention.

TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

Kevin Long and Mary T. Christel, *Column Editors*

Students consider Shakespeare's language use in their pursuit of balance between confusion and clarity as readers.

Shakespeare's Adventurous Language

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I used to teach Shakespeare by powering through student complaints. In response to their perennial confusion, I would assign vocabulary lists, give a primer on Renaissance pronouns, and plug my ears to their protestations, confident that reading Shakespeare was, in fact, not really that hard. This all began in 2014.

Then, in my third year of ignoring student feedback, I had the unradical notion of actually listening to them: what if they were right and Shakespeare doesn't actually make sense?

I first explored this question by returning to the *early* in *early modern English*. This was a nascent language, newly distilled from Latin, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman French. As England entered the Renaissance, there was an explosion of vocabulary and "the number of words 'available' to speakers

of English more than doubled between 1500 and 1650" (Simpson). Shakespeare, in particular, embraced the "inkhorn" fad of coining words, and thus, many of Shakespeare's words "would have been strange to Shakespeare's audience because they were the products of his invention or unique usage" (McDonald 41). While we as educators might dismiss comprehension issues in our students as arising from the archaic diction, by revisiting the semiotic expansiveness assailing the Renaissance spectator, we can see that comprehension issues are endemic, rather than accidental, to the text.

Yet, even when armed with this knowledge of early modern English, we often teach Shakespeare as a master communicator. Indeed, in his introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt explains, "[T]hough he [Shakespeare] shared his culture's delight in rhetorical complexity, Shakespeare always understood how to swoop from baroque sophistication to breathtaking simplicity" (65). This agility is one of Shakespeare's defining features, as he was able to create masterpieces that were available to

royalty, groundlings, and everyone in between.

But while Shakespeare may have been masterful, his audience may not have been his equal, a point which Greenblatt suggests, affirming that "it would seem inherently risky for a popular playwright to employ a vocabulary so far in excess of what most mortals could possibly possess, but Shakespeare evidently counted on his audience's linguistic curiosity and adventurousness" (67). If Shakespeare counted on his audience's curiosity and adventurousness, rather than their ability to fully comprehend his language, then why shouldn't I begin in the same place with my students?

Embracing this curiosity and adventurousness, I give my students the above historico-cultural context through an interactive *Edpuzzle* lecture and then loose them on the first scene of *Twelfth Night*. In our initial class, we analyze Duke Orsino's opening monologue; often, we spend the whole period on the first line: "If music be the food of love, play on" (1.1.1). We start with a question: What meaning can be made from this line alone? We begin with the

obvious: the Duke is in love. But *how* does he express his love? We label the metaphor “food of love” to see how he links love to an appetite, but then we move back into the first metaphor, “music be the food,” which combines with the second to form a syllogism: food is love, or rather love is food; but music is also food, so is music love? Already, we notice how Shakespeare causes confusion. How can music be food and love?

Maybe the answer lies in the context. How would a Renaissance audience hear the word *music*, for instance? The students head to the *Oxford English Dictionary* online to discover that *music* comes into English from the Middle French *musique*, which in turn comes from the Greek *mousike*, meaning *the art of the Muses*, so any artistic production might be considered under the broad *muse-ic* term. Shakespeare’s audience would have heard *muse-ic*, as both the art of the muses and music. This doubling of *music/muse-ic* changes how we read that final command to “play on.” We can musically play on, but we are also currently watching another *muse-ic* (a play), and this play has just begun—the play is now “on.” If the doubling of *music/muse-ic* opens up the polysemy of *play*, what else can *play* mean? Again, students explore the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions of *play* and find several meanings: to play an instrument; to act in drama; to engage in sexual activity; to move briskly; to pun.

All of these definitions work in this context: music is playing,

the play is being acted, Orsino is pursuing sexual activity, Orsino’s mind is moving briskly, and words are all in a state of play. In exploring the meaning of love for Orsino, we have followed our curiosity and adventurousness to explode a seemingly simple line of pentameter into a double-metaphor syllogism that leads into a polysemous command in the spondee “play on,” the final sense of which reflects the characters’ and audience’s confusion. So, what is love? Its meaning is in (the) play.

For the second and third classes, I assign a line to each student and have them tell me what these lines *might* mean. I select productive lines, typically centered around a pun or plocé—for example, the Fool’s use of *mend* in “bid the dishonest man mend / himself; if he mend, he is no longer dishonest; if he / cannot, let the botcher mend him” (1.5.42–45). Here the students begin with the wordplay, establishing the two definitions of *mend*, but then I ask them to increase the resonance of that line by suggesting what other meanings the Fool may be bringing forth (amend, emend, botch, botcher)—and to write out as many possible additional ways to interpret that singular word as they can (similar to our initial work on *play* and *music*).

As we move into later acts, students elaborate on these initial exercises by keeping word journals on a word of their choice: recording the etymology and definitions of this word, capturing two lines per act that utilize this word (or

related words), and explaining how this evolving use of the word resonates with the larger narrative changes in the play. For example, for *appetite* in act 2, Andrew affirms that life consists “not of the four elements” but “of eating and drinking” (2.3.10–11), while in the next scene, Orsino chastises women because “their love may be called appetite / no motion of the liver but the palate” (2.3.108–10).

Students can track how Andrew’s endorsement of the appetite as the very substance of life is problematized by Orsino’s subsequent conclusion that supplanting the humors with the appetite is the cause of women’s inability to love. As students home in on *appetite*, they notice an ambiguity in the construction of eating as both natural and unnatural, and connect this to a larger early modern confusion around desire, the appetite, the humors, and the elements.

For summative projects, I continue this explorative etymological work, tasking students to create reviews for the play from various historical class positions (visit qrcc.me/rgk0iur1s9ip for the assignment). The rubric rewards

How might we approach the text with a spirit of curiosity, rather than sense-making? How can we embrace adventurousness as we are continually challenged by an unruly play?

students for their acumen in explaining how audience members from differing positions would perceive differing meanings of the text's language. For example, in *Twelfth Night*, when the servant Antonio is arrested for defending Viola (disguised as his master Sebastian), Antonio responds, "Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame" (3.4.385).

The groundlings may have seen this as a betrayal of reputation ("good feature"), the merchants as a counterfeiting of the visual guarantee of quality ("good feature"), and the royalty as the shame that arises from failing to honor the noblesse oblige ("good

feature"). Each audience member would have likely heard the words *good feature* differently, especially when given the secondary context of Viola counterfeiting the "good feature" of her brother.

Our mantra through all of these exercises is "curiosity and adventurousness." How might we approach the text with a spirit of curiosity, rather than sense-making? How can we embrace adventurousness as we are continually challenged by an unruly play? How do we best acknowledge the confusion that the text places within us, not as our failure to understand, but as an essential function of the play? I invite

my students to hold the language loosely, to find the balance between confusion and clarity, and to embrace the sense and the non-sense of these linguistic plays. **EJ**

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Professional Development after an Active-Shooter Lockdown

The happy-hour special is paralyzed resignation.
Flavorless cocktail mixer muddled with cheap rum and
handed around by the gym teacher,
fluorescent fruit made for dull souls and vodka.
A friend makes a plan for next time:
"If I can set off the fire extinguisher fast enough
they can throw themselves out the window."
The logic being that fourteen-year-old frames are
flexible enough to bounce, broken limbs a better
alternative to body bags. . . . Today was lucky.
We do not have funerals to schedule.
Grateful booze sits in our stomachs like liquid lead,

grim, knowing smiles shouting in between shots
"in either case liquor is our most affordable option."
How else do you respond in a country where
"thoughts and prayers" is an insult,
dismissive denial masking the expectation that the
gravestones won't have your last name on them;
the same one signed at the top of every homework
assignment,
read off in every roll call.
If not yours, then always one of them.

—JULIA WARD

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THE FUTURE IS NOW

Luke Rodesiler and Alan Brown, *Column Editors*

A prospective teacher and teacher educator share insights from an inquiry into teachers' ideologies regarding antiracist teaching.

Supporting Preservice Teachers in Enacting Antiracist Teaching Practices

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We write as a preservice teacher (Emily) and teacher educator (Mandie) who believe English language arts (ELA) teachers have a responsibility to engage in discussions about race, racism, and antiracism in their classes. Yet we also know that many stakeholders in schools may position equitable teaching ideas as impractical or risky (e.g., Behizadeh et al. 179), leaving preservice teachers unsupported in efforts to enact antiracist pedagogies they have learned in teacher preparation courses.

In fact, practicing teachers expressed reservations about an early lesson Emily created and received feedback on as part of the Tampa Bay Area Writing Project's

summer institute in 2020. Emily developed a demonstration lesson with the poem "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar, which describes the "masks" African Americans create to survive oppression. Emily hoped to use the poem and creative writing responses to open discussions on race as a component of identity in secondary ELA classrooms.

While some inservice and preservice institute respondents expressed appreciation for the inclusion of this topic, others cautioned against addressing race directly in the classroom, warning of potential backlash from parents and administrators, such as questions on the scope of a teacher's role, and suggested that the lesson instead broadly explore identity and allow students to raise the discussion on race. We, Emily and Mandie, discussed why respondents may have had this reaction, but also decided we wanted to engage in a research inquiry project to better understand teachers' ideologies and philosophies on antiracist teaching, especially to prepare Emily for her final teaching internship.

Our concept of antiracism comes from *Stamped from the Beginning*, in which Ibram X. Kendi explains antiracism and antiracists as making visible how racial discrimination and discriminatory practices, not inherent differences, create disparities for people of different races (2). We also consulted the NCTE "Statement on Anti-racism to Support Teaching and Learning," in which Moore et al. recommend that educators "identify and challenge individual or systemic acts of racism" and "express strong declarations of solidarity with people of diverse human and cultural backgrounds." In ELA classrooms, teachers can identify and challenge acts of racism or express solidarity through class discussions, so we decided to focus our interview study on a time when teachers navigated a class discussion about race, racism, and antiracism. For the purposes of this column, we feature interviews from Amara (all teacher names are pseudonyms), a biracial Black and Greek woman with sixteen years of teaching experience, and Ginette, a White woman with ten years of teaching experience.

After Emily conducted and transcribed the interviews, together we conducted a two-tiered coding analysis of the interview transcripts, first examining the *authoritative discourses*—or discourses that “demand to be acknowledged” (Bakhtin 342)—about including discussions of race, racism, and antiracism in the classroom. We considered the ways these authoritative discourses become *internally persuasive* for teachers, or “interwoven with [their] own word” (Bakhtin 345).

We found that teachers’ (dis)engagement with antiracist teaching practices was influenced by authoritative discourses such as administrator expectations and legislation, as well as fear of penalization.

PRACTICING TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES

We found that teachers’ (dis)engagement with antiracist teaching practices was influenced by authoritative discourses such as administrator expectations and legislation, as well as fear of penalization. Although one participant adhered to their own internally persuasive discourse, we found that, for most participants, authoritative discourses became internally persuasive. In the following sections, we explore two

potential reasons for this phenomenon: survival and justification.

AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSES AS SURVIVAL

Amara emphasized authoritative discourses distinguishing the role of teachers from that of parents and expressed that students will be taught about racism “in their lives,” partitioning students’ identities between who they are in the classroom and in the world:

I know my role very well in the classroom, you know, and it’s to teach literature. . . . I don’t have a goal in my classroom to teach them about racism or to teach them about how to feel about things because you have parents for that, you know, and they’ll deal with that in their lives.

Amara’s belief, however, was in direct contrast to her personal experience as a biracial woman and a parent, shared later in the interview, where she explained the double standards that her Black sons face and conversations she must have with them to prepare them for that reality. When it comes to her personal life, she shared, “You just live it.”

The juxtaposition between these two ideas—that her students will come to understand their racial identity elsewhere but that her sons must be aware of how their racial identity affects their lives in all settings—and the reconciliation that Amara makes within her role as a teacher may be due to the stakes a teacher of color navigates when antiracist teaching practices arise within a system that disregards teachers’ identities

and experiences and treats them as interchangeable.

AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSES AS JUSTIFICATION

Ginette believed that discussions about racism should not be led by her, a White person:

I’m the only Caucasian person in that class. . . . So, like we talk about it, but I also let the other kids talk about it because they have more experience with it. So, I’m like, “Guys, I don’t have any experience here.” I was like, “I can’t offer you anything other than it really sucks that this is happening, and that’s on like the most surface level ever.”

Ginette’s reaction stemmed from a self-expressed difficulty with reconciling the gap between her experiences as a White woman and the experiences of her students who grapple with the negative consequences and violence of systemic racism daily. These experiences, however, are irreconcilable without a critical lens to examine how systemic racism and White supremacy create the environment in which discrimination exists. Ginette’s belief that she has no experience nor insights to offer serves to justify her practice of sidestepping or altogether avoiding the realities of her students. We understood her to be grappling with not only her whiteness and its privileges but also the recent legislation by lawmakers in Florida that denies the existence of systemic racism and instead limits teaching about racism to an interpersonal basis (“Rule: 6A-1.094124”).

TAKEAWAYS FOR PRESERVICE TEACHERS ENACTING ANTIRACIST TEACHING

These interviews helped us to understand teachers' resistances, hesitations, and rationalizations about classroom discussions of race with more nuanced perspective, a critical step for Emily in navigating her entry into school spaces, and for Mandie in supporting Emily in enacting antiracist teaching practices in her classroom.

The teachers we interviewed echoed Emily's experiences with pushback against antiracist teaching following her Tampa Bay Area Writing Project demonstration lesson and in her internship placement. By analyzing teachers' experiences, we were able to make sense of Emily's experience: the feedback she received, the emotions she felt, and the decisions she made. Amara's discussion about the complexities of navigating external pressures as a woman of color and teacher taught us not to make snap judgments about teachers, and to instead engage in conversations that illuminate the internal and external pressure teachers navigate when making decisions about antiracist teaching, as well as the ways they survive an imperfect system.

Many teachers who provided feedback on the demonstration lesson were teachers of color, and Amara's interview allowed us to reframe the feedback Emily

received as potentially a well-intentioned attempt to protect her from the pitfalls of the education system. Ginette's interview highlighted how White fragility becomes a way for White teachers to justify disengaging, and this served as a reminder for us to continually examine the conflicting emotions we experience and consider how whiteness influences our beliefs about and decisions toward discussions of race (DiAngelo 2).

We encourage preservice teachers who aim to use antiracist teaching practices to:

- develop an understanding of the complexities of enacting antiracist teaching practices by examining the possibilities in their teaching environment and pressures at the state, local, and school levels.
- discuss the practices with their partner teacher, including the partner teacher's thoughts and experiences with implementation, and consider the nuances of how this teacher's perspective may have developed against or because of external and internal pressures.
- consistently examine how their own identities and motives inform the decisions they make in

their classrooms, situating their choices as practical application related to the classroom environment or the text studied.

Finally, we suggest that teacher educators invite preservice teachers to engage in research inquiries about teachers' perspectives on antiracist teaching practices to support preservice teachers in understanding the dissonance they may experience when enacting antiracist practices, building relationships with partner teachers in specific school contexts, and clarifying their commitment to antiracist teaching. [EJ](#)

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Mrs. Weir

Thank you to my high school English teacher, Mrs. Weir,
For introducing me to literature. I remember reading
The Catcher in the Rye during junior year of high school,
And hearing Holden speak in an everyday manner,
And it spoke to me, along with his rebellious spirit,
Angsty teenager that I was. But it wasn't just Salinger's
Genius that led me to literature. It was the way Mrs. Weir
Talked about writing and art; writing was something of dignity,
And sophistication. I saw videos of Camus in black and white
In a beret and thought, that could be me. I could write like that.
I could stand like that. I could look away from the camera, just like that.
I remember the last day of school, senior year, going to Mrs. Weir's
Class for one last time, for her to sign my yearbook. She wrote that
I could be anything I wanted: a lawyer, writer, teacher. Anything.
I remember crying that night because I didn't know if I would ever see her
Again. Thank you, Mrs. Weir, for changing my life. Thank you for teaching
Me to love literature, and, more importantly, life.

—JOSE HERNANDEZ DIAZ

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It's Time to Live!

VIOLA CANALES

I cried when I read—in English and Spanish—about the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Two Mexican American teachers and nineteen of their students, also mostly Latinx, were murdered.

The gunman, according to a fourth-grade survivor, exclaimed, “It’s time to die!” And then started to shoot.

Schools should provide a place and time where students feel challenged but safe. However, that has not always been true for Mexican American students in Texas. In the 1970s, for example, Robb Elementary School played an important role, according to a story on National Public Radio, “in the fight for Mexican American equality” (Florida). At the time, the school’s principal, and almost all of the teachers, were White, spoke only English, and spanked Mexican American children for speaking Spanish.



In first grade, Viola didn’t understand English and was punished for speaking Spanish. Courtesy of the author. Used with permission.

Listening to the National Public Radio story took me back to my own days as a Mexican American child attending public schools in my native McAllen, Texas, in the 1960s and ’70s.

As a first grader, I cried almost every morning before I left home to walk to my elementary school. I didn’t understand English; although my parents were fluent in both English and Spanish, they spoke only Spanish at home, out of respect for my monolingual grandmother, so that was the only language I knew.

There, I had been raised with magical stories: my grandmother often scared me to death with cuentos about brujas (witches), duendes (little green people who live inside bedroom walls), chupacabras (goat-sucking monsters), and my dolls, who would dance on my head at midnight if I didn’t put them away and go to bed.

Or my abuelita captivated me with stories about our Mexican American family history—telling me that the Texas-Mexico border (eleven miles away) had crossed us, and not the other way around. By osmosis, her world—a world where the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgencita and patron saint of our Américas, loomed large—became my world, too.

But at school, I was issued books with stories about characters such as Dick and Jane, who spent most of their time running after a ball. Why?

And although my barrio was nearly one-hundred-percent Mexican American, my teacher was White, and so were the principal and most of the other teachers. They didn’t understand, nor want to understand, Spanish. They punished us for speaking Spanish, even on the playground during recess.

School filled me with fear and made me feel that Spanish was wrong, that being Mexican American was wrong, that the Virgin of Guadalupe was wrong, that my family was wrong.



This Virgin of Guadalupe image, which is wood-based, hung in the bedroom that Viola shared with her beloved grandmother. Courtesy of the author. Used with permission.

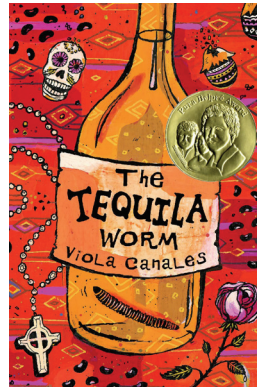
And to make matters worse—that I was wrong.

One morning, I woke with excruciating pain in my eyes. My mother took me to doctor after doctor. But my eyes grew worse. I thought I was going blind.

Then a woman came to the room I shared with my abuelita, with a chicken egg in one hand, a cup in the other. She placed the egg on my forehead and began to move it around and around my eyes in a figure eight, while she prayed and asked the Virgencita to heal me. She lifted the egg into the air, cracked it, poured it into the cup, and slid it under my bed, directly below my head.

The next morning, I awoke and the pain was gone. The barrio's curandera, the woman who finally healed me, had no formal education, unlike the doctors, with their university degrees, who had failed. I started then to listen to, and remember, stories of my barrio that became the basis of my first novel, titled *The Tequila Worm*.

Eventually, I learned English, became bilingual, and stopped fearing school. But I always knew I was



living in two separate worlds. One of my abuelita's favorite dichos was: "Cada cabeza es un mundo." Every head is its own world.

Then in 1972, I won a scholarship to a private boarding school in Austin, Texas, over three hundred miles away from my home.

When I got there, school once again became a place to cry. I felt terribly homesick. I missed my family, my friends, my barrio, and especially my grandmother, who had died that summer. The boarding school world also felt strange. Unlike McAllen, with its hundreds of years of Mexican American culture, foods, music, art, family traditions, and spirituality, the boarding school world focused on getting students into good colleges through continuous classes, field sports, study halls, tests, and more tests. There was Tuesday chapel and Sunday service, too, but I never felt the sense of the spiritual or mystical that I experienced at home.

On the flip side, my English teachers were excellent, and they exposed me to other rich and stimulating worlds through books. I met works by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, and E. E. Cummings, among other authors. For our senior year, we were required to write an author paper on the books of a writer of our choice.

By then, reading books that didn't reflect my home world did not alienate me as the *Dick and Jane* series had done in my first-grade classroom. I had learned to meld other worlds into mine.

Traveling between school and home for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and summer breaks, I came to see the best of each—what I chose to add to *my* world.

I felt drawn to the writing process because it focused my imagination and empowered me to create worlds where my grandmother still lived and laughed; I was no longer homesick.

What I most loved about home, aside from family and friends, were the stories I heard and learned to tell at *sobres* around the dinner table. I always got a laugh when I told the true story of my first marriage proposal. I was working at a packing shed one summer, sorting cucumbers. On a break, a young man who drove a forklift walked up and asked me if I wanted to marry him. Astonished, I shook my head and said that I didn't even know him. Later, I realized how desperate he was to stay in the United States, as is true for many other immigrants.

What I found most exciting about the school world, aside from making new friends, were the novels, stories, and poems I discovered, discussed, and wrote about. To this day, I still remember the thrill of sitting around the table in English class when the teacher gave us forty-five minutes to write an essay on the significance of the green light in *The Great Gatsby*. Both these scenes—the marriage proposal and the writing exercise—made it into *The Tequila Worm*.

One day, thinking of home, I remembered the curandera who had cured my wounded eyes with prayer and an egg, and then recalled what my abuelita told me never to forget: to ask the spirit world for help and guidance. Suddenly, memories of my grandmother splashed into my mind like a refreshing spring rain. I laughed at her funny *dicho*: “No le busques rido al chicharrón,” which translates roughly to “Don't go looking for the noise in the crackling.” The meaning is to “mind your own business” or “don't go looking for trouble.” Abuelita is right here, I felt.

I grabbed a pen and paper and frantically started to write—words, feelings, images, whatever came to mind. My pen was like a magic wand that conjured my world into my dorm room. That's when I started to become a writer. I felt drawn to the writing process because it focused my imagination and empowered me to create worlds where my grandmother still lived and laughed; I felt at home and was no longer homesick. Writing also added a dimension of wonder,


spirituality, and mysticism to the 24/7 college-focused school world I had been slogging through.

Over the following years, I had many adventures: working as a field organizer with César Chávez's and Dolores Huerta's United Farm Workers labor union, serving as a US Army officer in Germany, practicing law, and running the West Coast operations of the US Small Business Administration as a presidential appointee. But I always kept writing, often about my childhood and memories of being born and raised in the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley, which locals call El Valle.

And one of my greatest joys is to return to Texas to give readings at schools where I encounter children and adolescents whose teachers and librarians, themselves often Mexican American too, now understand and appreciate their students' home culture and world. Students also now read books that respect, reflect, and celebrate the lives of people and characters who live in worlds like El Valle. And Uvalde.

One of the many tragedies of Uvalde is that the nineteen children who were killed—Nevaeh Alyssa Bravo (age 10), Jacklyn Cazares (9), Makenna Lee Elrod (10), Jose Manuel Flores Jr. (10), Eliahna “Ellie” Amyah Garcia (9), Uziyah Garcia (10), Amerie Jo Garza (10), Xavier Lopez (10), Jayce Carmelo Luevanos (10), Tess Marie Mata (10), Maranda Mathis (11), Alithia Ramirez (10), Annabell Guadalupe Rodriguez (10), Maite Yuleana Rodriguez (10), Alexandria “Lexi” Aniyah Rubio (10), Layla Salazar (11), Jailah Nicole Silguero (10), Eliahna A. Torres (10), and Rojelio Fernandez Torres (10)—will never get that chance to learn, to grow, and to share their vibrant lives, culture, and stories with their families and the world.

And the two Uvalde school teachers—Irma Garcia (age 48, who had taught at the school for 23 years) and Eva Mireles (44, a teacher for 17 years)—who died while trying to save the lives of their students, will not introduce future generations to the power of books, words, and ideas.

The Uvalde gunman was so very wrong.
It's time to live!
With Love.
In English. In Spanish. In every and all of our world languages.
In the Americas. Las Américas. Everywhere.
For Love is love is love . . . is love . . . then, now, and always. 

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VIOLA CANALES is an award-winning Tejana author who was born and raised on the Texas-Mexico border. *The Tequila Worm*, her first novel, won the 2006 Pura Belpré Medal for narrative, and *El gusano de tequila*, the Spanish translation, was awarded the 2014 International Latino Book Award for translation. Her other books include *Orange Candy Slices and Other Secret Tales* (a collection of short stories), *The Little Devil and the Rose / El diablito y la rosa* (a bilingual collection of poems), and her most recent novel, *Cecilia’s Magical Mission* (2020). She is currently working on a second book of stories, as well as a collection of essays. Viola lives in Stanford, California, where she teaches a creative writing and reading course at Stanford Law School, and she often travels to her other home in McAllen, Texas, where she finds her writing inspiration. You can contact her at violacanales@aol.com.



Pre-algebra

Break me down
 into my simplest form.

Resemble that of a fraction
 a counterreaction to my lack of passion.

Plagued my middle-aged soul
 numbers never make me whole.

Rather stuff my face
 with ten thousand egg rolls.

Spending all
 of my bankroll.

Then wasting my time
 adding . . .
 subtracting . . .
 multiplying . . .

Dividing my core
 like the last piece
 of decadent apple pie.
 Yet, all I can do is ask, “Why?”

Math—
 forever a warpath
 embedded in flames,
 one where I never
 end up unscathed.
 The bitter aftermath
 of living life aimlessly
 with half a soul
 and sinkhole for a brain,
 choking on the haze and smoke.

The highest octave of pain is power,
 but I am left steadily trying to
 comprehend
 this twisted game of give and take.

Numbers and letters don’t mix.
 No matter how hard we try to mold
 our broken souls into one,
 some broken pieces just can’t be fixed.

Let me begin again,
 for a growth mindset
 is all it takes to unlearn
 from my past mistakes.

From being broken down,
 passion can soon be found with
 the right remedy . . .
 the right cure . . .
 the right part . . .

No scaffolding,
 just vision and art.
 They go hand in hand
 and should never be apart.
 Our students, challenged
 to always want
 more pre-algebra:
 reunited at its core.

—DARIUS PHELPS
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DARIUS PHELPS is a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University. He is an adjunct professor at CUNY Queens and Hunter College. An educator, poet, spoken word artist, and activist, Darius writes poems about grief, liberation, emancipation, and reflection through the lens of a teacher of color and, most importantly, experiencing Black boy joy. Recently, he was featured on WCBS Newsradio 880 and highlighted the importance of Black male educators in the classroom. Darius can be contacted via email at dmp2219@tc.columbia.edu.



Bildungsroman of a Disadvantaged Brown Kid

You were more of an observer than a participant.

You knew right from wrong but didn't always do right.

You had less than others did but more natural gifts.

Your parents sacrificed a lot for you to be a late bloomer.

It didn't rain much in childhood but that's not saying much.

Sometimes, you'd come home after sunset, but you were just playing ball.

Some of your friends and siblings took fateful, wrong turns.

But you're still alive and you've no fear of tomorrow.

You're still alive and statistics mean nothing to you.

You're still alive with a flame in your hand.

—JOSE HERNANDEZ DIAZ

First published in Cherry Tree: A National Literary Journal at Washington College

(2022) and reprinted with permission of the poet.

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JOSE HERNANDEZ DIAZ is the author of the chapbook of prose poems *The Fire Eater* (2020). He was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowships program grant for poetry in 2017. Jose holds degrees in English and creative writing from the University of California, Berkeley, and Antioch University Los Angeles. His forthcoming book is titled *Bad Mexican, Bad American*. Jose lives in southern California and can be reached via *Twitter* @JoseHernandezDz.



MotherScholar Work on #StopAsianHate during COVID-19

(inspired by Maya Angelou's poem "Woman Work")

Praying for families afar,
I've got a young child to entertain,
Her online schooling to manage,
Her music practices to accompany,
The groceries to order,
The food to cook,
And my online classes to prepare.

"Why did my classmate call it the
Chinese virus?"

Said a perplexed first grader.

"Did I do something wrong?"

Asked a teary Chinese preservice
teacher.

It's not YOUR fault.

It's not YOUR fault.

The elderly were pushed down,
Beaten up,
And killed.

I've got my child to talk through,
My elderly friends to worry about,
My students to comfort,
And myself to calm down.

Fall on me, the shadow of fear.

Burn my heart, the sorrow and
anger.

Sting my soul, the Sinophobic
stigma.

I'm a mom.

I'm a teacher.

I'm alive.

I'm ready to resist.

—TING YUAN

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TING YUAN is an assistant professor who teaches undergraduate literacy methods courses in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the City University of New York, College of Staten Island. A member of NCTE since 2014, she was awarded the Geneva Smitherman Cultural Diversity Grant in 2014. Ting can be reached at ting.yuan@csi.cuny.edu.

this isn't about you

“remember, sam, this isn't about you,”
mrs. lambert was a stern face,
 gray hair and wrinkles,
 my cooperating teacher,
 an absent mentor,
her students and i laughed at her
 behind her back,
 a worn-cardigan-back,
teaching wore her out,
 her cardigan too,
she gave me two sections of
 11th- and 12th-grade creative writing,
 the keys to the kingdom,
“good luck,” in march,
“this isn't about you,” in june,
 what wasn't about me?

i laughed her away in 2001,
big laughter to survive student teaching
 and everything that came next,
i wasn't laughing as hard
 in 2022,
teaching wore me out, too—

validation for the sake of validation
 is a trick,
tricked me into thinking
 i mattered too much,
tricked me into thinking
 others mattered less,
tricked me into missing
 the togetherness
found in affirmations of
 difference,
you're here with me now,
 mrs. lambert,
as are the others
 i've come together with,
 i've mattered with in schools,
i'm done laughing you
 away—

—SAMUEL JAYE TANNER

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SAMUEL JAYE TANNER is an associate professor of English education at the University of Iowa, and has been a member of NCTE since 2012. He is a teacher, writer, and improviser, and has published articles in *English Journal* and *English Education*. Contact Sam at samuel-tanner@uiowa.edu.

The Truth about Why I Love to Teach Writing

(after Mekeel McBride's poem “The Truth about Why I Love Potatoes”)

1

Of everything you experience in school, learning to write might be the most magical: You have an itch and grab language, translate it into symbols on napkin, notebook, yellow pad, screen. With nothing said aloud, meaning blooms in readers' minds.

2

I guess I forgot to mention how writing can heal your hurt, spread balm on regrets. You start with what you remember, an image, a smell, a fragment of language. You write what you don't expect. If you stay honest and press with detail, words hold their breath and dive to depths you've never been. They bring understanding to the surface.

3

If writing were a person, it would be a gardener. It would step into the cold greenhouse in March, turn on the space heater to boost the day's dim sunshine. Like a gardener sowing seeds, writing is profligate, pushing words just deep enough into a draft to sprout. When ideas shoulder through to light, a gardener is gentle, attentive, encouraging with water and nutrients. When plants are strong, she is ruthless, selecting, thinning, repotting. A gardener trusts process. Growth and development are her watchwords.

4

Teachers who write know there is surprising language and perception dormant in the most unpromising students.

5

If I could have my wish, every teacher would teach writing. It's the essential skill to nurture in all students. They learn faith in the language in them, fearlessness heading down the page with it. They learn the pleasure of finding the right words, of treasuring linguistic rhythms, of shaping evolving meaning. As they write to find truth in essays, stories, and poems, they become better readers, too.

—TOM ROMANO

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TOM ROMANO is an emeritus professor at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. His most recent book is *Write What Matters: For Yourself, for Others*. A member of NCTE since 1973, Tom can be reached at romanots@miamioh.edu.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: 2023 DAVID H. RUSSELL RESEARCH AWARD

The David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English recognizes published research in language, literature, rhetoric, teaching procedures, or cognitive processes that may sharpen the teaching or the content of English courses at any level. Any work of scholarship or research in language, literature, rhetoric, or pedagogy and learning published during the past five years (between January 2017 and December 2022) is eligible. Works nominated should be exemplary instances of the genre, address broad research questions, contain material that is accessibly reported, and reflect a project that stands the test of time.

Nomination information can be found on the NCTE website at <http://www.ncte.org/awards/david-h-russell-research-award/>. Nominations must be submitted by **March 1, 2023**. The award will be presented at the NCTE Awards Ceremony associated with the Annual Convention.

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION: THIS STORY MATTERS AND THE RATIONALE DATABASE

The right to read is one of the foundations of a democratic society, and teachers need the freedom to support that right so their students can make informed decisions and be valuable contributors to our world. Book rationales are some of the strongest tools for educators to show why This Story Matters in their schools and classrooms. The This Story Matters project is an ongoing effort *by* NCTE members *for* NCTE members, and you are invited to

- access the rationale database to search and download available rationales,
- help expand the title selection by signing up to write a rationale,
- suggest titles to add to the database, and
- join the team to peer-review newly submitted rationales.

To access the database and learn more about ways to get involved, visit us at ThisStoryMatters.com.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: 2023 NCTE MEDIA LITERACY AWARD

The Media Literacy Award showcases NCTE members who have developed innovative approaches for integrating media analysis and composition into their instruction. Individuals, teams, and departments that have implemented and refined exemplary media literacy practices in their school environment are invited to apply. Submission information can be found on the NCTE website at <https://ncte.org/awards/ncte-media-literacy-award/>. Award submissions are due by **June 15, 2023**.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: 2023 GEORGE ORWELL AWARD

The NCTE Public Language Award Committee is now seeking nominations for this year's Orwell Award, which honors an author, editor, or producer of a print or nonprint work that contributes to honesty and clarity in public language. For more information, please visit the award webpage at <https://ncte.org/awards/george-orwell-award/>. **The nomination deadline is May 1, 2023.**

NEW FROM NCTE!

REIMAGINING LITERACIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Multimodal Strategies to Teach with Technology

Pauline S. Schmidt and Matthew J. Kruger-Ross

Living in a multimodal world can be overwhelming.

To prepare students to produce and consume the diverse texts made possible through innovative technologies, Schmidt and Kruger-Ross advocate for a slower and more deliberate approach to thinking and planning for teaching literacies. They showcase how technologies can expand, enhance, and inspire the consuming and producing powers of secondary students by examining visual and aural literacies before multimodal literacies.

With a combined 40 years of teaching experience and six years of co-teaching literacy with technology, these teacher educators and Notorious Pedagogues podcasters share their vision of technology in the literacy classroom, highly influenced by the pandemic-fueled need to embrace remote teaching. Each chapter begins by connecting its topics to a section theme and contextualizing the topic in a way that makes it easy for readers to understand its connection to the overall purpose of the text.

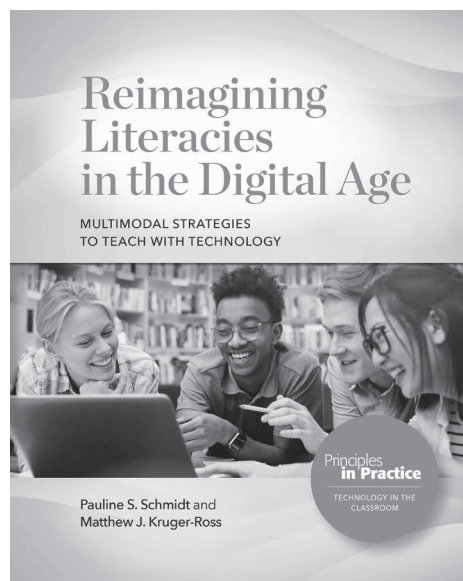
Part of the Principles in Practice imprint, this book is based on NCTE's *Beliefs for Integrating Technology into the English Language Arts Classroom* position statement. Both reflective and practical, the book also includes:

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Principles
in Practice



181 pp. 2022. Grades 9–12

- The authors' critical lessons and reflections about secondary teaching;
- The voices and materials of practicing and preservice teachers, via QR codes;
- Explanations of how the technological examples represented best exemplify specific literacies; and
- Information for preservice and early career teachers, as well as seasoned classroom professionals.

For the Love of Literacy & Language



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NEW FROM NCTE!

CAN WE TALK?

Encouraging Conversation in High School Classrooms

Susanne Rubenstein

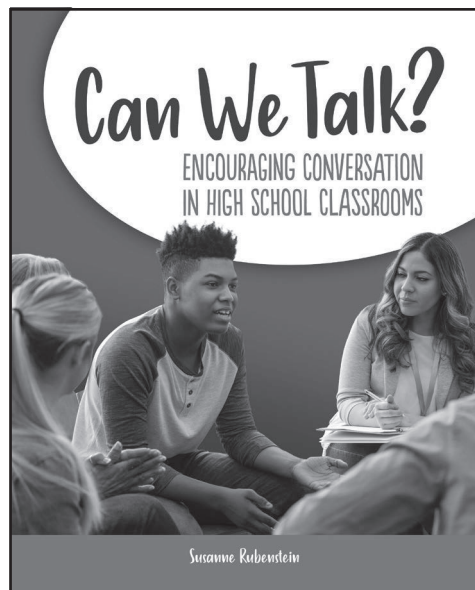
The proverbial “lost art of conversation” has become more than a cliché. Once, young people learned the art of conversation outside of the classroom—in their homes, in social groups, and with their peers.

Today, such human encounters are limited, partly because of the ubiquitous presence of technology. Face-to-face conversation offers a different and vital kind of connection, one that is at the core of our humanity and essential for a democratic society. As teachers, we have a responsibility to help our students find their voices and truly listen to the voices they hear.

This book offers an understanding of what students and research tell us about the biggest hurdles to fruitful conversations, particularly in the age of remote learning, along with:

- Techniques for encouraging and guiding focused conversations.
- How to help students feel heard and seen during class discussions.
- Practical strategies for navigating difficult conversations.
- Ways to use conversation to help students hone their writing.

At a time in history when the world is so divided on so many issues, and when technology often hinders rather than facilitates true human



153 pp. 2022. Grades 9–12

connection, the answer to the question “Can we talk?” is that we, as teachers, must make conversations happen. The strategies and activities described in this book are easily integrated into an already existing curriculum and will allow students to become not only better speakers, but better writers, better thinkers, and better human beings.

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NEW FROM NCTE!

SPECIAL ISSUES, VOLUME 2: RACIAL LITERACY: SOCIOPOLITICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS FOR YOUTH

Edited by Ayanna F. Brown

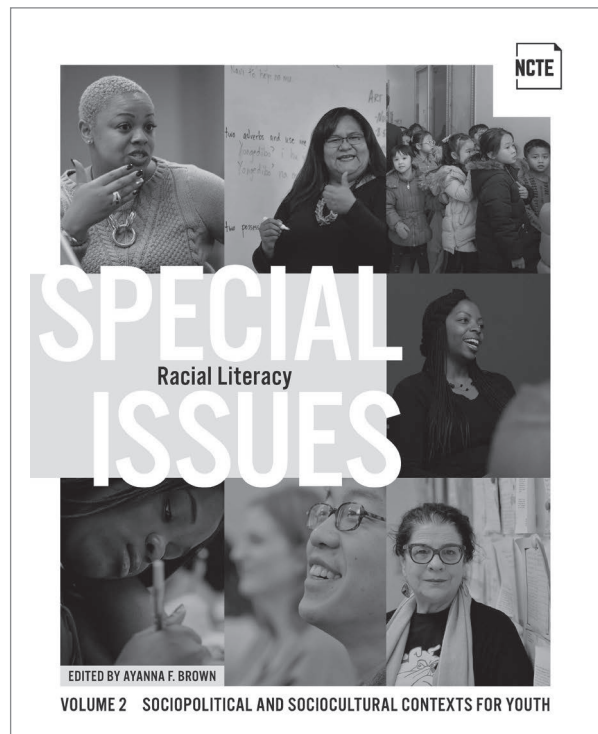
This volume questions what constitutes literacy in a society organized by race as an inquiry, to deepen the significance for why K–20 learners must develop knowledges that support their abilities to process and ultimately transform racism. With this collection of original essays, editor Ayanna F. Brown helps to push the field of racial literacy into new directions, to avoid niceties and other pitfalls, to get to the heart of racial understanding, to better respond to the needs of our students and society.

This volume brings forth emerging scholars who seek to respond to the sociopolitical and sociohistorical aspects of racial literacy as it relates to youth. The scholarship grapples with how educators at every level think through racial literacy in their work and within their experiences. Each contribution adds depth to the question of agency and illuminates why racial literacy work extends social justice efforts to become a call for a culture of teaching and learning that recenters liberation as an active pursuit.

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114 pp. 2022. Grades K–12

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NEW FROM NCTE!

Teach Living Poets

Lindsay Illich and Melissa Alter Smith

Teach Living Poets opens up the flourishing world of contemporary poetry to secondary teachers, giving advice on reading contemporary poetry, discovering new poets, and inviting living poets into the classroom, as well as sharing sample lessons, writing prompts, and ways to become an engaged member of a professional learning community.

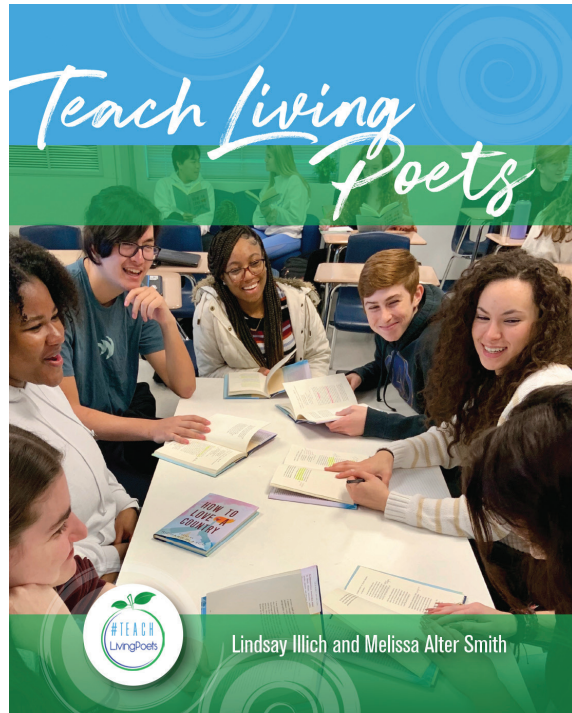
The #TeachLivingPoets approach, which has grown out of the vibrant movement and community founded by high school teacher Melissa Alter Smith and been codeveloped with poet and scholar Lindsay Illich, offers rich opportunities for students to improve critical reading and writing, opportunities for self-expression and social-emotional learning, and, perhaps the most desirable outcome, the opportunity to fall in love with language and discover (or renew) their love of reading.

The many poems included in *Teach Living Poets* are representative of the diverse poets writing today.

Visit our website: <http://bit.ly/LivingPoets>
or call toll-free: 1-877-369-6283

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201 pp. 2021. Grades 9–12

Lindsay Illich is a professor of writing and the director of the Writing Program at Curry College in Milton, Massachusetts. Her most recent poetry collection, *Fingerspell*, was published by Black Lawrence Press in 2020.

Melissa Alter Smith created the #TeachLivingPoets hashtag, manages and edits teachlivingpoets.com, and is a National Board Certified high school English teacher.

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NEW FROM NCTE!

Challenging Traditional Classroom Spaces with YA Literature

Students in Community as Course Co-Designers

Ricki Ginsberg

As a high school teacher, Ricki Ginsberg realized that a truly student-centered classroom requires student input. To foster a more ethical, community-based approach to curriculum design and instruction, she worked with her students to reimagine and co-design existing, grade-level courses, and in doing so, they integrated YA literature as central to the curriculum and course design. In this book, Ginsberg, along with more than a dozen teacher contributors, shares course design possibilities for teachers seeking to disrupt and reimagine traditional structures with the inclusion of YA literature.

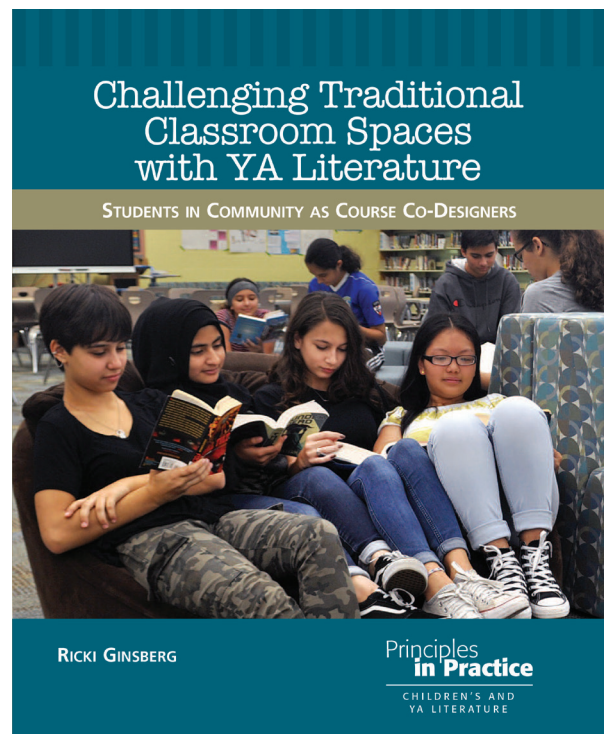
Grounded in NCTE's *Preparing Teachers with Knowledge of Children's and Young Adult Literature* position statement, this book offers both big ideas, such as overarching structural decisions and pedagogical positioning, as well as a wealth of flexible and adaptable practical strategies and ideas that can be implemented directly in secondary classrooms with varied contexts and purposes.

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Principles
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155 pp. 2022. Grades 9-12

Ricki Ginsberg, a former classroom teacher, is an associate professor of English education at Colorado State University.

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