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FOR A SUBMISSION CHECKLIST to help you organize the required elements of your submission go to http://www.octela.org/newoctela/submitrule.html.
OJELA’s Call for Manuscripts

Write Now
Volume 49.2
Summer/Fall 2009
Deadline: April 30, 2009

Our students are writing more than ever as they craft emails and text messages. Writing is an important component of literacy, and as the world evolves, our students will have an even greater need of being able to communicate through their composition skills. How do you incorporate technology into your writing assignments? What types of compositions are the cornerstones of writing instruction in your classroom? Is the five paragraph essay still an essential building block for the teaching of writing? How do you use free-writes or journals with your students? What strategies work best for peer review, revision, and editing? Multigenre writing has become a routine in many classrooms; how will this mode of instruction translate into the necessary skills for college classrooms that still require traditional style papers? What success have you had in teaching research papers? How do you handle the paper load?

Making Story Telling
Volume 50.1
Winter/Spring 2010
Deadline: August 15, 2009

Stories are everywhere in school—in our language arts classrooms, in the lunchrooms, in the hallways. Teachers tell stories to their students to convey life lessons and encourage appropriate behavior; students tell stories to their teachers to validate a common experience and explain an absence. Teachers tell stories to each other to celebrate a successful lesson or to reflect upon a student’s behavior; students tell stories to each other to complain about their teachers and to constitute a sense of community with their peers.

Increasingly, we are learning to use these stories—to read and reread them, to tell and retell them, to analyze and reanalyze them—to our benefit, to learn about teaching, learning, and schooling. Specifically, teachers are learning to use stories as research and are learning to tell stories to learn about their own pedagogical practices and the structures of their classrooms. Further, teachers are learning to use storytelling as a genre in their classrooms, to teach and use narrative across grade levels for multiple purposes.

For the themed issue, Making Story Telling, we invite stories, stories as research, stories about teaching story, story as pedagogy, stories about students and teachers writing together.

Volume 50.1, a Golden Year, welcomes two new editors to OJELA. They are Jeff Buchanan of Youngstown State University and Meg Silver of the Columbiana Local School. Read more about their many accomplishments in the next issue of OJELA.

Please address any questions or manuscripts for issues 50.1 – 52.2 to the new editors. Contact Jeff Buchanan, English Department, Youngstown State University, One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555.
Author Guidelines

The Ohio Journal of English Language Arts (OJELA) is the official journal of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (OCTELA). Published twice per year, OJELA circulates to approximately 2,300 language arts teachers of elementary, secondary, and college students. The journal seeks to publish contributions on all aspects of language arts learning and teaching within a number of editorial columns, departments, and feature articles.

Types of Manuscripts Sought

In each issue, we publish a range of information and ideas. We welcome submissions and inquiries for the following sections of the journal. When you submit a manuscript, please identify the type of manuscript you are submitting.

I AM A TEACHER: Language arts instructors are invited to submit original essays that reflect their passion for teaching. We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words. What keeps you going, even during the most difficult times? How do you avoid teacher burnout? What motivates you to be a teacher? Why do you stay in our profession? What was your most rewarding experience as an educator? We are looking for real stories written in a conversational tone.

TEACHER TALK: Readers are invited to respond to our themed question for each issue. This is a forum for teachers to share their ideas, materials and activities in short pieces of 300 words.

✦ What does writing instruction in your classroom look like? How does it reflect new modes of communication? (April 30, 2009)

Poetry submissions relating to teaching will be accepted. We suggest that you submit no more than two poems at a time. Please keep in mind that we cannot return submissions.

Editorial cartoons, focusing on educational issues, run periodically in the journal. Like poetry, cartoons cannot be returned.

Issue Theme articles are concerned with topics designated by the issue theme. Themes for upcoming issues are detailed in the Call for Manuscripts.

Art and Photos Teachers are invited to submit original student art in keeping with the theme of each issue or photos/artwork that illustrate written articles. Art should be no more than 8” x 10” and meet industry standards for reproducibility. For details see the Manuscript Guidelines below. Permission to publish forms must be included with all submitted art.

Manuscript Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to answer the most common questions associated with preparing and submitting manuscripts. For more detailed questions, contact the editors.

Manuscript format. Submit 5 clear copies of each manuscript, typed and double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and references), and 2 self-addressed stamped envelopes for correspondence with the editors regarding your manuscript. At the same time you submit hard copies, email an electronic copy in Microsoft Word 2003 doc or as an RTF file to margeford@gmail.com with the subject line, “OJELA Manuscript.”
Manuscripts should have 1-in. margins on all sides and be printed in a 12-point font. In general, manuscripts are 10 to 20 pages in length, and all pages should be numbered.

On one of the 5 copies, attach a cover page with the following information: title of the article, author name, address, school affiliation, phone number, fax number (if available), email address (if available). If the article is intended for a themed issue, indicate that also on the cover page. Your name (and names of any co-authors) should appear only on this cover sheet, and nowhere else in the manuscript. This ensures an impartial review of the manuscript by outside reviewers (explained below).

Finally, with the copies of the manuscripts include a letter that guarantees that the article is your original work and has not been published or submitted elsewhere and a brief biography of 2-3 sentences to be used in the event your manuscript is published.

**Style issues.** The readership of OJELA includes language arts teachers at all grade levels, so we recommend you adopt a conversational style that avoids educational jargon and highly specialized terms. Within such a style, the use of “I” is appropriate when making personal observations. We do not accept term papers or other lengthy manuscripts filled with references. Manuscripts should also adhere to the “Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications,” available from NCTE (1111 W. Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801-1096).

When a manuscript is accepted for publication, we may make suggestions or revisions in consultation with the principal author. However, because of publication deadlines we reserve the right to make minor revisions without seeking prior approval from the author.

If you reference other writers’ work, please follow APA style, as outlined in Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th ed., available in libraries or from the American Psychological Association (APA Order Dept, Box 2710, Hyattsville, MD 20784).

Tables, graphs, and charts are often difficult to read and expensive to typeset. Unless absolutely necessary, please do not submit manuscripts containing these items. Photographs and artwork are accepted with manuscripts, although you should keep in mind that permission to use images is required. Authors must obtain written permission from the photographer and the subjects in the photograph. (For more on permissions, see below.)

**Please note:** If tables, graphs, charts or other artwork are an essential part of your manuscript, you must submit these items as separate files. Embedded images will not be accepted! Charts and graphs that are drawn using numerical values must have these values accessible, either as separate line list items or on the art itself. This allows us to accurately reformat this information to fit the column width of the issue.

**Art/Photography.** We encourage readers to share art and pictures that reflect the learning communities in your school and classroom. All reproduced artwork should be at least 8” x 10” and on high quality, opaque paper. Photography submitted as prints should be printed on glossy paper free of smudges and preferably no less than 5” x 7”. Digital photography should be taken at the highest setting possible — no less than 3 megapixels. An image at this setting is 72dpi and approximately 31” x 22” or 10 megs. This setting will allow us to reproduce at full column width while meeting the quality standards of the printing industry. You may contact edellinger@southern.org for instructions on how to ftp large files instead of using email.

**Manuscript Acceptance.** After your manuscript is accepted, please submit the final version via email attachment (in Microsoft Word 2003 OR as a RTF file). In the subject line of the email put the author’s name and a condensed title of the article we’ve accepted. In the text of your email, please include the complete title of your article, author’s name, plus contact information where you can be quickly reached in case of problems. Also include the issue of OJELA for which your article was accepted.

**Permissions Policy**

It is your responsibility as the author to secure permissions for copyrighted work that appears in your article. While short excerpts from copyrighted material may usually be quoted without permission, any excerpts from poetry and song lyrics almost always require the author’s written permission. Likewise, any student work, text or graphic, requires a signed release from the student and, if the student is a minor, the signature of a parent. To protect students’ identities, it is generally recommended that you use pseudonyms. If real names must be used, the author must secure
permission as above. The OJELA editorial office will provide forms for permissions and releases, though the author must pay any costs associated with permissions. If you are using student work, please request the Student-Consent-to-Publish form.

**Manuscript Review Process**

We will acknowledge receipt of your manuscript with a card, sent to you in one of the stamped envelopes you provide with copies of the manuscript. The co-editors initially read all manuscripts to assure that they are appropriate to the audience of the journal. If we deem the manuscript inappropriate, we will send a letter advising you of our decision and suggesting other sources for your work. Unfortunately, we cannot return manuscripts; however, if you wonder about the appropriateness of your topic, we suggest you contact the editors and discuss your article before you submit your manuscript.

Once the editors have read manuscripts, copies are sent to at least two outside reviewers, whose interests and expertise are matched to the subject of the manuscript. Reviewers read the manuscript and make recommendations for publication and revision. Once recommendations from all reviewers have been returned to the editors, we will make our final decisions about whether to publish your manuscript. The review process takes at least three months.

Our decision will be communicated to you in a letter sent in the second stamped envelope you provide. In the letter we will summarize the reviewers' comments, suggest revisions based upon the reviewers’ and our own readings of the manuscript, and provide a deadline for revisions. You will also be assigned a supervising editor who will assist you in revisions and the details of preparing the final copy of your manuscript for publication.

**How to Contact the Editors**

Address manuscripts and correspondence to:

**OJELA**

c/o Marge Ford
83 Creed Circle
Campbell, OH 44405.

You can also reach us in the following ways:

- **Marge Ford**
  330-755-0162
  margeford@gmail.com

- **Colleen Ruggieri**
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- **Susan Stevens**
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**Ohio Teachers Write**
Scott Parsons  
*Outstanding English Language Arts Educator Award*

**Michele Winship  Ohio Education Association**
Dealing with Violence Through Literature

“...In violence we forget who we are” wrote twentieth century writer Mary McCarthy. Since September of 2001 we have seen violence permeate almost every aspect of our American life. From responses to terrorist attacks to a divisive foreign war to increasingly violent school situations, our view of ourselves as confident world leaders has soured. As teachers we have reeled from outside and inside attacks on what was once a sacrosanct area of childhood and adolescence – our classrooms and schools. Whether it is the overt violence of bullying, the glorified violence of media or the inherent violence of poverty and neglect that an increasing number of our students face, this century’s challenge provokes us professionally and demands more of us personally than we understood when we chose to become educators. For this reason alone the articles written in response to this issue’s call are vital to our understanding of what is happening around us and how we can be healthier and more positively valuable in our classrooms.

Launching this issue’s theme is Rick Williams’ powerful and provocative interview with young adult literature author Chris Crowe. Crowe reveals what decisions he makes when he includes violence in young adult novels, how violence shapes characters and how it impacts plot and theme.

Following this is Kathy Everts Danielson and Jan LaBonty’s “Reading and Responding to Children’s Books About Bullying.” In this article the authors share their research about the nature and affect of this type of student-on-student violence. In addition, Danielson and LaBonty describe how urban third and fourth grader’s respond to a variety of examples of children’s literature which deal with bullying. Next is Sally Lamping’s “Uncovering Miracles with Writers in Residence.” Lamping describes the experiences of English graduate students she mentored as they became writers in residence in an urban elementary charter school. Lamping details how her students learned to deal with the violence that their students experienced in their daily lives while those primary and middle school students learned the mitigating power of writing in their lives. Concluding this powerful section is “Armando and the Blue Tarp School – The Inside Story: The Making of a Book” by Edith Hope Fine and Judith Pinkerton Josephson. It is in this article that we are reminded of the inherent power of learning and how little more than the powerful relationship between learner and teacher is really needed.

There are other topics to be considered in this issue and first among these is Deb DeBenedictis’ “What? Write Worse?: Assessing Student Writing from Both Ends of the Continuum.” DeBenedictis writes about her fourth grade class and how she teaches them to use metacognitive skills to improve their writing. The other essay focusing on teaching English language arts is by William Bintz who describes “Noun Poems: Using Literature to Teach Parts of
Speech.” His article describes the design for an action research based professional development program which helps teachers use poetry to increase both the quality and quantity of literature second grade students read as well as their understanding of language structures and conventions.

Our continuing series of focusing on familiar voices provides a place for Caroline Loomer to share a moving sketch in which she powerfully describes why she is a teacher. Then Marge Ford shares vital internet resources in her “Violence Half-Dozen.” Regina Rees summarizes powerful examples of children’s literature showing how children react to a wide variety of violence from simple bullying, to life in gangs, to multiple examples of the horrors of war. Her counterparts, the Teen Extreme librarians (the pseudonym for young adult literature librarians Cynthia Beach, Beverly Chearno and John Waller) also share examples of powerful literature. The stories they highlight include portraits of adolescents who deal with rape, gangs, drug abuse, bullying, and the horror of 9/11.

In addition to the wide variety of articles in this issue, we are sharing our excitement and pride at the five affiliate awards that the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language arts won at NCTE’s Fall Conference. Of course, we are especially proud of the first place award for excellence of an affiliate journal that was awarded the Winter/Spring 2008 issue of OJELA which addressed the focus of assessment.

Co-Editors

Margaret Ford, Youngstown State University
Colleen Ruggieri, N.B.C.T. Canfield High School
Susan L. Stevens, Youngstown City Schools (retired)

March, 2009

Marge Ford is an adjunct instructor at Youngstown State University and a former president of OCTELA. In 2002, she was recognized by OCTELA as an Outstanding Language Arts Educator. She serves as a director and treasurer of ALAN and is OCTELA’s liaison to NCTE. She retired from the Campbell City Schools where she spent 35 years as both teacher and library/media specialist.

Colleen Ruggieri is a National Board Certified language arts instructor and National Writing Project consultant who teaches at Canfield High School and Youngstown State University. She is the editor of “Tools for Teaching” a column in the English Journal, NCTE’s scholarly journal for secondary language arts educators. Colleen was recognized as OCTELA’s Outstanding High School Language Arts Educator in 2001.

Susan L. Stevens, Ph.D., was recognized as OCTELA’s Outstanding High School Language Arts Educator in 1996. She has since served the Youngstown City Schools as Language Arts, Foreign Language and Social Studies Supervisor and Supervisor of Professional Development. She was co-director of the Far East Regional Professional Development Center. She has also taught at Youngstown State University and Kent State University where she was the project director for the Jennings Urban Fellows Project.
NEW! At ohiorc.org, a website just for K-5 literacy educators

Discover resources you can use immediately:

- **Virtual bookshelf** with sets of engaging, standards-aligned tradebooks featuring commentaries, explicit suggestions for literacy instructional use, and links to related ORC resources
- **Questions from the Classroom** column discussing common literacy questions and sharing practical ideas for enhancing instruction
- **Mini-collections** organized around key language arts instructional topics
- **Reading comprehension strategy modules** with instructional ideas for use before, during, and after reading
- **Quick picks** of “must-see” lessons selected from the ORC collection
Application for OCTELA Membership P-177

- Make checks payable to OCTELA and mail to Ruth McClain—644 Overlook Drive Columbus, OH 43214

CHECK ONE:
- Professional Membership $35
- Student or Retired Membership $12

Name: ____________________________
Address: __________________________
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____ Middle Childhood  ____ Secondary  ____ College
____ Vocational  ____ Retired  ____ Student  ____ Other

You may use this form for NCTE membership also.

Enroll me as a member of the National Council of Teachers of English.

- Membership Dues: $40
- Journals must be purchased separately:
  - Language Arts $25
  - College English $25
  - SLATE Newsletter $15
  - Primary Voices $15
  - Voices from the Middle $20
  - NCTE Plus $15
  - Research in the Teaching of English $20

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Bill Me:
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- Expiration Date: ______________________

NCTELA is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English: Affiliate Code P-177
Affiliates Awards:
OCTELA Celebrates Excellence

Teachers from across the United States gathered in San Antonio, Texas, last November to celebrate Teaching in the 21st Century at NCTE’s 2008 Annual Convention. One of the highlights of the convention was the Affiliate Breakfast where affiliates and teachers were honored for outstanding achievements throughout the year. Once again, OCTELA was the recipient of five awards.

First Place:
Ohio Journal of English Language Arts

The purpose of this award is to honor outstanding affiliate journals and their editors and to encourage excellence in these publications. The primary purpose of the journal is to focus on instruction of English language arts and related topics. Journals are judged on the following criteria:

- Evidence of research and scholarly exploration—qualitative or quantitative research, multiple-point data as support, recommendations for best practices and professional development opportunities in relation to current professional literature.
- Variety of content—research-based articles, articles related to teaching practice, teaching stories, affiliate news, book reviews, poetry, and coverage of important issues in English language arts education.
- Effective writing—well-organized, well-supported, clear purpose, engaging voice, fluent, free of convention errors.
- Professional graphics—readable and attractive design, appropriate cover art, clean typography for body copy and headlines, artfully organized, appealing to different teaching assignments.

Margaret Ford (pictured above), OJELA co-editor accepted the First Place journal award in San Antonio. Susan Stevens and Colleen Ruggieri are also OJELA co-editors.

Elizabeth Dellinger is OCTELA’s Production and Design Manager. Judges unanimously and enthusiastically praised OJELA for being “professionally edited, designed, and published. The focus of the Winter/Spring 2008 issue was timely and addressed the focus of assessment in a variety of
ways. The issue was enhanced with editorial clarity and consistency with well-written articles written by a mixture of K-12 and university authors." Reviewers also liked “the reviews of nonfiction books for students, the efforts of providing materials for elementary teachers, and the well-researched, fine writing in an academic voice."

**Affiliate of Excellence Award:**
Established in 1997, this award is given by the NCTE Standing Committee on Affiliates to affiliates that meet standards of excellence to which all affiliates should aspire. In order to win this award, affiliates must complete a number of criteria:

- Increase or maintain current membership
- Publish a particular affiliate communications instrument at least twice a year—journal, newsletter, web page.
- Conduct at least one program event in professional development in the English language arts for affiliate members.
- Register for and attend at least two affiliate sponsored activities at the NCTE Annual Convention.
- Complete the NCTE affiliate report forms by the July 15 deadline.
- In addition to the Affiliate Excellence Award, apply to at least one other awards program sponsored by SCOA and/or SLATE.
- Participate with at least one delegate in NCTE’s regional leadership conference when offered in alternate years.
- Implement and maintain a plan for affiliate activities that incorporates cultural diversity and inclusion in the language arts profession.
- Publish a different form of communications instrument IN ADDITION TO the communications instrument aforementioned.
- As an affiliate, nominate at least one member of the affiliate for an NCTE office or nominating committee.
- Participate in SLATE and/or legislative and/or non partisan policy making activities during the year.
- Participate in a project or activity directly involved with curriculum development, either through the affiliate or through local or state education agencies.
- Create an affiliate strategic plan for multiple years that includes an annual budget.

**Honorable Mention**

**OCTELA Website**
Margaret Ford, OCTELA Webmaster, accepted this award given to honor affiliates that have websites that meet the following criteria:

- Ease of Navigation
- Current Content
- Speed of Loading Information
- Privacy Policy
- Size Designed to Scale of Monitor
- Beyond the website: Networking features available to allow site visitors to communicate—message boards, live chats, mailing lists
- Links: links are valid and webmaster ensures that any off-site links are kept up to date and that links are removed from the site when they become invalid. Congratulations Marge on a job very well done.

**Leadership Development Award:**
Karen Valentine
Each year, state affiliates choose an early career teacher with one to five years experience to receive the NCTE Leadership Development Award. The teacher must be one who has never attended an NCTE Annual Convention
and who has demonstrated a capacity for professional leadership as well as a willingness to join and participate in the affiliate during the upcoming academic year.

OCTELA’s choice for 2008 was Karen Valentine who is in her second year of teaching English language arts at Everts Middle School in Circleville. Karen was also awarded $500 to help defray costs of attending the NCTE Annual Convention in San Antonio and a ticket to the Affiliate Breakfast at which she was recognized.

Karen noted that, “There were so many great sessions at the conference, it will be a long time before I can assimilate them all.”

**NCTE/SLATE Intellectual Freedom Award**

**Stacey Ciancio**

The purpose of the NCTE/SLATE Intellectual Freedom Award is to honor individuals, groups, or institutions that merit recognition for advancing the cause of intellectual freedom. Stacey “consistently pushes students to think critically about ethnicity, sexuality, mental illness, and other subcultures in our society.” She encourages students to look beyond their white privilege and, in her multicultural literature classes, she addresses female genital mutilation and uses YA and contemporary literature to help her students connect with their own world. Stacey teaches at Hilliard Davidson High School in Hilliard, Ohio.
Most OJELA readers are very familiar with Chris Crowe. He is the author of *Mississippi Trial, 1955*, *Getting Away with Murder: the True Story of the Emmett Till Case*, *Up Close: Thurgood Marshall*, *From the Outside Looking In*, *Presenting Mildred Taylor*, and *Teaching the Selected Works of Mildred D. Taylor*. He is a past president of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN) and one of its most hardworking and respected leaders. Chris is a Professor of English at Brigham Young University in Utah, specializing in young adult literature. In our conversations, he is always most animated when describing his family—his wife Elizabeth, their children, and their grandchild.

Recently, Chris traveled from Provo to Youngstown State University to address the members of the Western Reserve of Ohio Teachers of English (WROTE) and their guests. I gladly accepted the opportunity to be Chris’s chauffeur on conversation-rich drives back and forth to the airport, to the university, with a side trip to Handel’s Ice Cream Shop, a Youngstown area tourist must. Most of this interview took place during those trips, as we chatted about family, the upcoming NCTE Convention in San Antonio, and even football.

We did have the opportunity to “tackle” some other issues, especially topics related to the theme of this issue of OJELA, Violence.

Your books about Emmett Till deal with the violence which ended that young man’s life. The details surrounding his ordeal as revealed in your research are very graphic. What decisions did/do you make about the amount of violence you include in those graphic, realistic descriptions, given the age range of your readers?

CC: It was tough researching and writing about the Emmett Till case, but once I decided to write about it, I knew I couldn’t water-down the actual details of the case. My goal was to use facts from the case—including photographs in *Getting Away with Murder*—to tell the story as honestly as I could without dwelling on gruesome details. I wanted readers to feel some of the pain from that story so they could realize—if they haven’t already—that racism wasn’t merely about where people go to school or sit on the bus, it was about the elimination and domination of fellow human beings. Emmett Till was an innocent fourteen-year-boy, who was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered, because of his race. That story ought
to horrify anyone who reads it, not because of its violence, but because of the incredible inhumanity of it, especially in a nation founded on principles of equality and fairness.

I had to immerse myself in that part of U.S. history and try as best I could to understand what went on and why, then I had to decide how to portray that history in fiction and in nonfiction in ways that would be both accurate and powerful to YA readers. There’s one scene I wrote in *Mississippi Trial, 1955*, whose creation is still vivid in my mind. I’d been trying to characterize R. C. Rydell, a villain in the novel, as a villain-in-training early in the novel. I thought about what a boy who might grow up to become a killer would be like as a boy, and this scene of R. C. fishing in the Yazoo River started playing in my head. R. C. catches a catfish and ends up mutilating it for fun. I’m not sure where that scene came from, and I remember walking home after I’d written thinking, “Am I sick or what? And what if some kid reads that scene one day and thinks, as knucklehead boys sometimes do, “Hey, that’s really cool! I want to try that.” There’s not a single violent scene in the novel or violent detail or graphic photo in the nonfiction book that I haven’t agonized over. In writing both books, it was a constant battle to decide how to portray the details in meaningful and potent ways that wouldn’t be excessive.

The famous, old quote cautions “violence begets more violence.” Is that merely effective political rhetoric or valid advice for language arts teachers?

CC I’m not an expert in this, but it does seem to me that the more a kid is exposed to gratuitous violence or the more that he sees violent games or books or movies as forms of entertainment, the more he or she becomes insensitive to the real pain and horror of violence. Here’s an example: for years when I read newspaper articles about car accidents in which the victims were “treated and released” from the hospital on the same day as the accident, I thought, “Well, they were lucky.” My perspective changed when my son was in a car accident that ended up with him shattering the window with his forehead. The paramedics fished him out of the car, performed some on-the-scene first aid, then took him to the hospital where he was cleaned up and stitched up—“treated and released.” He was in pretty bad shape when he came home, and ever since that more personal encounter with the violence of a car accident and the real meaning of “treated and released,” I have much more empathy for accident victims who suffered minor injuries and were “treated and released.” I wonder if it’s not the same for teen readers who experience violence vicariously in computer games and in books. The steady stream of violence might lead them to assume that it’s really not so bad, that it’s even sort of entertaining, and there’s no way for them to understand the terrible suffering real victims and their loved ones endure when they become targets of violence. Unless, of course, they experience it themselves, and that’s certainly not a good option.

So I guess I’m opposed to violence without context, gratuitous violence that serves as the most base kind of entertainment. Scenes of violence in movies or novels that are integral to the overall quality of the story are somehow different, even more acceptable. A thoughtful writer or producer will use such scenes in artistic ways that contribute to the artistic quality and power of the story.

How do you define “gratuitous” violence in books for young adult readers?

CC ‘Gratuitous’ as a synonym for ‘unwarranted’ suggests that gratuitous violence in a book, movie, or video game is violence that’s there unnecessarily. It doesn’t develop a character, advance the plot, or do anything to enhance the aesthetic of the story. It’s just a cheap device to shock the reader or to appeal to his most base interests. Gratuitous violence might evoke comments like “cool” or “gross” from teen readers, but instead of enhancing the quality of the story, gratuitous violence cheapens it.
Some view sports as a realm of controlled violence. Your current study of baseball player and pioneer, Larry Doby, includes acts of violence against him on and off the diamond. Certainly, your own years in football on the O-Line and as a coach give your thoughts on this subject much credence.

CC Well, now I feel kind of hypocritical when I criticize violence in books, movies, and computer games as entertainment. Many sports, especially football and hockey, encourage violence, and it’s that very violence that attracts fans. The games are a form of entertainment for many, many people, and when we see those games on TV, they really aren’t much different from video games, are they? It may be that sports fans have a better sense of the reality of the violence—and the purpose of it—in football and hockey because the brutal aspects of those games aren’t perpetrated by real people on real people and because that violence is only part of a larger event. If those games ever devolve into senseless combat, something gladiatorial to entertain the masses, well, then, they’ll be no better than the violent video games that I’ve condemned.

When I have heard you speak at conferences, you often repeat the mantra, ‘Ask questions. Do research. Write.’ When teachers engage students in texts—both fiction and nonfiction—that present violence, how can they use that advice?

CC Well, the good thing about violence—if there is anything good about it—is this: usually violent acts get recorded somewhere, by someone. Violence gets people’s attention; it wakes them up, shocks or angers them. That means that for most historical acts of violence—whether it’s the Boston Massacre, the Nat Turner slave rebellion, the murder of Emmett Till, the My Lai massacre, the 1999 murder of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas, or even the World Trade Center attack in 2001—there are likely to be several accounts of what happened and why it happened. That was certainly true in the Emmett Till case. Anyway, students can ask questions about the text they just read in school and then do their own research to see what other accounts exist and how they differ—or if they differ—from the text their teacher presented to them. They can track down multiple sources to gather as much information as possible and then critically read and compare those sources to their original text. Then, using what they’ve learned from their research, the students could write their own account of that violent incident, an account that more accurately portrays what “really” happened. Such an exercise would work great in research.
and writing, but it will also help students learn, firsthand, how slippery and subjective history can be. It might also make them more critical readers of historical texts they encounter in the future. Finally, researching and writing about historical acts of violence may make students more closely, more personally acquainted with the true reality of violence and its myriad and unpleasant consequences, thus making them, dare we hope?, more violence-adverse than they were before undertaking a project like this.

Your biography of Thurgood Marshall, a “thoroughly” good read (note: Marshall’s first name was originally “Thoroughgood” so the pun is intended), recounts incidents of violence which the future Supreme Court Justice both experienced and witnessed. How do you think violence shaped young Thurgood?

CC Violence and the threat of violence had a huge influence on Marshall. As a young African American, he learned quickly that White people could abuse him for any reason at all. As a high school student, he witnessed many police beatings in the precinct building next to his school. As a law student, he learned about violence on a large scale—for example, the lynching of African Americans—and in person at autopsies his law professor required students to attend. As a lawyer, he represented the families of murder victims and individuals falsely accused of murder, and prosecuted murderers. When he began working for the NAACP and acquired a reputation as ‘Mr. Civil Rights,’ he received constant death threats by mail, phone, and in person. His familiarity with violence and the threat of violence made him especially sensitive to the plight of marginalized people: ethnic minorities and those in the lower socioeconomic rungs who were most vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and the lack of protection. So, violence really did have a huge influence on Marshall. He really believed in equal protection under the law, and his career focused on using the law to protect all Americans from violence and other kinds of mistreatment.

I think Chris best captures the heart of this dilemma in the biography of Thurgood Marshall in which he introduces a comment by the respected justice:

…in 1969, after violent race riots had erupted in cities across the nation, Marshall spoke out against the Black militants who advocated the use of violence to secure equal rights for African Americans…”Nothing will be settled with a gun. Nothing will be settled with a firebomb. And nothing will be settled with a rock….It takes no courage to get in the back of a crowd and throw a rock. Rather, it takes courage to stand up on your own two feet and look anyone straight in the eye and say, ‘I will not be beaten.’” (Marshall qtd. in Crowe 188-190)

References
Uncovering Miracles with Writers in Residence

Michael Blitz and Mark Hurlbert (1998) published *Letters for the Living* ten years ago, but I still reread their publication when I teach or talk about violence in schools. In the very first page, they remind us: “Our students face deaths of all kinds — every day — of the body, of spirit, of hope, of desire, of the ability to care” (p. 1). They call on us to question whether or not we are prepared for the stories our students will tell us. Continually, I find that I am not ready.

In the spring of 2008, I piloted a project with ten willing, but reluctant, English graduate students. Through a course entitled “Exploring Teachers and Writers Collaboratives,” we partnered with an urban elementary charter school to serve as writers in residence. We modeled the pilot project after New York City’s Teachers and Writers Collaborative, which has paired professional writers with public school classrooms for over forty years. My students would serve as writers in residence for first, second, third, fourth, and seventh grade classrooms at our partner school. Our goal was to work with these elementary students on creative writing, especially poetry, but we did not have specific goals when the project began. As the writers in residence became familiar with their classrooms and partner teachers, Writers at each grade level developed their own specific projects.

A few of the writers had some teaching experience in secondary schools and at the university level, but others had not entered a school for decades. All of them, however, chose English because they loved to write. Some of them were published authors and others were aspiring poets. Yet, on the first day of class they all seemed worried. Their fears ranged from anxiety about very young students to the distance between them and the experiences of urban children.
believed they had nothing to offer these students: their worlds were too separate. In preparation for our first day at the school, we read Sam Swope’s (2005) *I Am a Pencil* and mused about his own blunders as a writer in residence. We explored guides for teaching story writing and poetry in schools and, finally, we read Michelle Fine’s (2003) chapter entitled “Silencing and Nurturing Voice in an Improbable Context.” Nevertheless, we were completely unprepared.

Armed with a few ideas about writing with young people, we entered the school. The orientation involved a school overview and a profile of the student body. When the principal spoke about parental substance abuse, incarceration rates, and the surrounding neighborhood, I watched the writers’ eyes widen. She was frank about the violence her students encountered. Death, separation, poverty, and abuse were integral parts of her students’ lives. She used this cautionary profile to explain some of the problems experienced by the student body. One problem in particular was their test scores. She was excited that we might assist with Ohio Achievement Test preparation. As she described the test and the students’ issues with writing, especially poetry, the writers flinched. They were not prepared or interested in working on test preparation. Equally, they now seemed nervous about the student population. After hearing such cautionary information, it is often difficult for teachers or writers in residence to approach their students objectively. I hoped they would embrace their potential students as children rather than statistics. As we found our way to classrooms and partner teachers, it became apparent that some of the writers were expected to teach that day. Although it might sound strange, it was fortunate none of them had planned lessons. Without predetermined agendas, they were better equipped to follow the children.

I sat in the back of the first grade class watching the new writers in residence test their audience. They were nervous. We forget how large groups of first graders can cause severe anxiety. The writers struggled through Bill Martin’s (2006) *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* as they tried to get the students excited about words and sounds. The biggest problem was that the students were already excited. They popped out of their seats on the carpet, waving hands in the writers’ faces so they could recite the chant. They were so interested in words. They couldn’t write very well or even read well yet, but they loved the sounds strange words made and the repetition of the chants. They wrapped the writers in their excitement. The writers asked the students about their sensory experiences: the sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings of their lives. When they asked about sounds, the students shouted “bang, bang” or “the sizzle of a frying pan” or “people yelling” and “sirens.” When they referred to smell, the students brimmed with “dead bodies in the summer” or “flowers” or “sweet perfume” or “the hot bus.” Their feelings ranged from “lonely” to “sad” or “soft like my grandma’s hands.” Their worlds flowed with new sights of “the green grass” and “my new dress” or “my house.” The writers caught their leads. They didn’t falter when these tiny voices shouted about the violence they saw, heard, or smelled every day. It was all part of the joy and beauty the students also experienced. As Gertrude Stein (1926) once wrote, they were composing: “Any one creating the composition in the arts does not know it either, they are conducting life and that makes their composition what it is, it makes their work compose as it does” (p. 424). It was just that simple.

During our next university class, we debriefed about our collective experiences with the students. We expressed our sadness at the numerous experiences with death, destruction, and hopelessness these tiny people faced daily. We couldn’t help but revisit our own privilege to help conceptualize their experiences. By reminding ourselves that these experiences were all part of other experiences, ones that included joyfulness, hope, wonder, and courage, we realized that they were no different from our own. We were all composing. As teachers, when we accept such things, we forfeit our desire to try to save our students. When we recognize the problems inherent in saving our students, we begin the process of teaching them how
to navigate their own lives. We give them the tools and they choose how to use them. In this, we respect them as fellow travelers. Their journeys may be different than our own, but they are not more pitiful. Instead of planning writing projects that pushed the elementary students toward salvation, the writers in residence devised projects that reached out to them as young people.

In the first grade, the writers planned to celebrate language; each week, they planned activities to get students out of their seats, imagining, acting, playing, and questioning. In the second, they tapped into their students’ love of sharing by working on a class newspaper. In third grade, they worked toward creating a variety of sensory experiences so students could develop the skills to write deeply and specifically about their dreams. In fourth, they fell into their students’ collective silliness by teaching them to create silly poems, rhymes, and chants. In seventh grade, they wrote. They sat in a circle week after week and wrote from pictures, from other poems, from song lyrics, from each other’s pieces, and, more importantly, they shared. They filled pages of journals with starts, stops, and finished pieces. The writers did not teach to the perceived violence in the students’ lives. Instead, they taught children. They approached them as writers who have stories to tell: sad, happy, violent, or peaceful.

It would be easy to end here and not tell about the difficulties we experienced. It would also be quite unfair. After all, we were working with young people. Regardless of background, children can be wonderfully unruly. In each classroom, the writers met resistance, behavior problems, disrespect, and tension with partner teachers. The elementary students broke personal property, tore papers, talked back, disrespected each other and the writers, refused to share, and fell asleep. Each week after our sessions, we labored over our roles in the classrooms and accepted the fact that some weeks, students just weren’t writing. We cried and complained when students disrespected each other and the materials we worked diligently to implement. We argued about how to proceed and expressed our disappointments in our own perceived failures. We experienced, however briefly, the lives of teachers.

Like any dysfunctional relationship, week after week, we returned. We entered the classrooms with renewed excitement for the teaching of writing and our projects. We relished the hugs, smiles, and cheers when we entered the classrooms. Ultimately, we accepted the good with the bad and realized, like all great teachers do, how to focus on the brief miracles. When the seventh graders all clapped and cheered for the young man who was once ostracized, but had now emerged as a budding poet, we also cheered. When the third graders, realizing that their writing day had been switched for that week, sulked and moaned, we felt their loneliness. When the second graders finally got their class newspaper into their hands and ran through the room jumping up and down, pointing to their own words printed on the page, we were jumping too. When a fourth grade boy, in the midst of his very silly colleagues, recited his poem about a dead goldfish and finally caught the class in silence, we were silent too. Really, we were just part of the composition.

Revising our Plans
Writing with young people is difficult work. It asks the teacher or writer in residence to accept what students can offer us, whether it is a detailed list of dreams or a description of a funeral. It is in acceptance that we find our opportunities for mentoring. There are always stories to tell. When we do work similar to this, we find that our students’ stories become our own and when these stories are about violence, we bear the sadness that our students are too young to comprehend. By the end of this project, my students found ways to work through this sadness. They developed five culminating experiences for their classrooms. These experiences pushed students to write, reflect, and celebrate the compositions of their lives. Yet, I must mention that these projects were not geared toward writing about violence. Instead, they allowed the students to write about living. The projects made no assumptions; instead, they offered boundaries, but incorporated choice. Equally, they respected the young writers in each classroom and moved them toward understanding the process of loving the words on a page.

First Grade
Initially, the writers who worked with the first grade thought it might be nice to give them journals. After one class period in which they waited endlessly for the first graders to print their names perfectly at the tops of their papers, the writers realized they needed to spend more time exploring oral language. Each week, they read a zany book with the first graders.
They narrated different voices and asked the students to come up with sounds to punctuate the stories. They found Jack Prelutsky’s (1986; 1996) poetry to be an exceptional resource for this grade level. His books of poetry, especially *Read Aloud Rhymes* (1986) and *A Pizza the Size of the Sun* (1996) piqued the first graders’ interests and tapped into their imaginations.

They discussed rhythm quite often with the students and spent time working on different rhythms with new sounds. For example, they had the students use their pencils on a variety of surfaces to find the different noises pencils could make. Then, they worked on creating chant poems with the class. They used their new pencil sounds to punctuate the chants. In this activity, students explored sound, but also how it fits and doesn’t fit with language. The activity also used resources that are common in classrooms.

Much of Prelutsky’s work focuses on imagining the impossible. The first graders found this to be an easy task, but struggled with describing specific mental pictures. The writers used the tableaux method to help them focus on the correct words for what they were imagining. They would read a line of poetry and a group would act it out for the class. Then, the students would compose a line for a class poem and a group would demonstrate the actions of the line. The “actors” would continue to demonstrate until the class was satisfied with the precision of their line. The writers used this strategy to build a poetic dramatization over a series of classes. They divided the class into two smaller groups, and titled both poems “A Spring Day.” With each visit, the groups composed a part of their poems.

On the final day, the groups performed their poems for each other. The two sides of the class had very different interpretations of what a spring day might look like. As the poets read the group poem, the children acted out the lines. Each group chose to divide the lines into smaller groups. There was a group of suns that came onto the stage and glistened over the audience. There were several raindrops that danced over the stage with glee. There were flowers that moved in the breeze. There were also gunshots and sirens sweeping through the town, and dead bodies, lying hot in the sun. The plays were complicated, but in the children’s minds, they were quite simple. They gave us a window into their lives and the violence was just a part of the play.

**Second Grade**

The second graders were much more interested in the social aspect of writing. Unlike the first graders, they could compose simple sentences and spent less time perfecting their letters. They wanted to interact with each other and the writers. So, the writers introduced a class newspaper. They spent a day discussing mascots and how to choose a catchy, but informational name for a newspaper. They looked at newspapers with the students and talked about the sections, titles, and types of newspaper writing. They voted on a mascot and newspaper name. Then, they discussed the features of non-fiction. Students did a newspaper activity each week. They conducted interviews with each other and the writers, wrote lists, reviewed songs and movies, and described objects. In the end, they made selections of their best pieces to share through the newspaper. They also took photographs of each other and the writers.

The writers in this classroom used few outside resources for their project. They easily built the unit around print media, and the students served as guides for what to include in their newspaper. The most popular news stories were the lists students made of their favorite things. The writers used objects to get students thinking about description. They purposely chose soft, plush items, rough or jagged pieces, and different sizes and shapes. The students chose one “favorite thing” from the items the writers provided. Then, they completed their lists by adding items similar to their original object. This helped them to start writing and follow a topic throughout their list poems. During the
newspaper project, the writers began sessions with an experience to get students thinking. Then, they built on this experience through the writing activities.

In the end, the newspaper was a glowing success. The students were so proud of their writing, photographs, and drawings. They were impressed with the size of the newspaper (it was much like the actual size of a newspaper) and relished having their own names as authors for the articles. It was impossible to look at it, however, without a reminder that such success happens when we allow students to be a part of the process. The writers included them in every step of making the newspaper. In order to represent each student fairly, they asked for the students’ single best pieces. They worked with students to correct the errors before publication. All of this gave students ownership of the project and, as a result, called them to invest in the final product.

**Third Grade**

The writers working with the third grade met with the teacher before meeting the students. In that first planning session, the writers introduced their ideas to her and she welcomed them. Nevertheless, she continued to remind them that her students were in need of hope. Since becoming their teacher, she noticed that they had significant trouble describing their future aspirations. They had difficulty visualizing their lives beyond that week. She wanted them to learn to imagine themselves in a chosen future. She wanted them to dream. For the writers, this was a very sad conversation. They had difficulty imagining such a desperate situation and questioned the teacher’s interpretation of her students’ hopelessness. Yet, they respected her advice and devised a project that would uncover some truths in that classroom.

On the first day, they set up sensory tables. They gave the students note cards to record their experiences. There was only one rule for the activity: in the description of the experience, they could not name the object. At one station, a group of students ate strawberries, chocolate, pudding, and chips. At another, they listened to jazz, hip-hop, and classical music. One station featured magnifying glasses and colored lenses to look through. A different area displayed lotions, perfumes, powders, and shampoos. One table contained a large box with a hole cut in it. Students could reach their hands in and feel the different objects inside. The most difficult piece was describing their experiences without saying an item smelled like perfume or tasted like strawberries. The writers worked with them to talk about texture, sensory memories, and onomatopoeia.

This experience served as the foundation for students’ personal writing. On the next class day, the writers took Polaroid pictures of each student. They asked the students to remember their sensory exercise. Then, they asked students to look at the pictures and describe themselves. They asked them to be specific and use the words from the toolbox they had created previously. As the weeks progressed, students did more activities in which they described their likes and dislikes, neighborhoods, and favorite people. Finally, the writers asked them to revisit the photographs. The original descriptions were revised to include likes and dislikes, heroes in their lives, and important events. Then, they nudged students to make a leap. They asked them if all of these things might be the same in the future. The students said yes to some and no to others, but it started the conversation about growing up. This conversation led seamlessly to a discussion about their hopes and dreams.

In the end, the writers and students made a quilt. The quilt incorporated pieces that celebrated who the students were and who they wanted to be. Each student decorated two squares in the quilt: one for now and one for their later lives. On the final day, the writers invited parents and guardians to attend the tea they planned. They presented the quilt and each student stood next to his or her squares and read from the quilt. Working on the squares as individuals and
then combining them as a community strengthened the class bond. Students cheered and snapped for each other. The experience uncovered the plethora of hope in their classroom.

**Fourth Grade**

The most difficult class was the fourth grade. The students greeted our writers with sly cynicism. They were small, but they were wise. They asked many questions and giggled at the writers. Sometimes, they resisted writing and socialized. Yet, for the most part, they reveled in silliness. They wanted to be silly for their classmates and teacher. They wanted to spend the writing time laughing. So, much like the writers in the first grade classroom, the fourth grade writers in residence started reading silly poems for the class. Then, they asked students to write their own. The students invented new words, wrote funny stories about everyday objects, and talked about their pets. Nevertheless, in all the silliness, there were very serious moments.

One day, the writers brought in “Harlem: A Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes (1951) and asked students to describe their heavy loads. They wrote about grandmothers and pets dying. They remembered absent parents and lost friendships. They described brick walls and confined spaces. The fourth grade presented a new challenge. They could name their sadness. They understood awkward and tried mightily to defeat it. They wrote about their fears, but were afraid to share them.

The writers respected their cues. They decided to create a book with the students. The students could pick and choose pieces to add to the book as the workshop progressed. When they wrote about sad things, they never shared. When they wrote about silly things, they let the students share abundantly. In the end, the book reflected this classroom dynamic. It was sad and afraid, but it was also childish. The book demonstrated how writers keep secrets and shout the truth, all on the same page. The students were so proud of their work. The bounced around the classroom tearing the books out of each others’ hands as they ponted to their pieces. Yet, when the writers asked for a read around, they grew shy again. They shared their silly pieces and kept the secrets close.

**Seventh Grade**

In the seventh grade, the writers in residence were fearless. From the moment they entered the classroom, they knew the students had stories to tell. They arranged the rows into a circle, passed out new composition books, and set about the task of creating a group poem. On the first day they passed out a paper that said: “I am afraid of ___________________________. What I really meant to say was ___________________________.” They asked the students to anonymously fill in the papers. While the students were at lunch, the writers took the papers and glued them together on a board to make a class poem. The students were amazed at the fears they shared. They were also interested in how the second line of the poetry prompt got them to think more clearly. One student recalled that the second line forced him to go back to the first and reflect on what he was really trying to communicate. It added clarity to the first line, but didn’t ruin the flow of the class poem.

At each session, the class completed this exercise. They communicated happiness, worries, fears, sadness, and pain. They also discussed dreams and failures on these tiny papers. Each week, they rushed in from lunch to see their pieces combined with the others to make the class poem. Then, the writers would take that topic and show them how contemporary poets write about such feelings. They shared the works of spoken word poets like Piri Thomas and Saul Williams. They talked with students about rhythm and tapped out words with the class. They discussed songs and lyrics. Yet, most importantly, they wrote. The seventh grade wrote for the majority of the class. At the end of class, they listened to the writers’ pieces and shared their own. As they saw how the writers read both finished and unfinished pieces, the students became more comfortable. The writers corrected their own work as they read and revisited it on the following week to get the class critique. Instead of teaching about writing, the writers in this class shared the writing experience with the students. They offered them invitations through pictures, words, collage, and music, but they trusted the stories within the class.

On the final day, they had a read around. The students brought their journals, now worn and dog eared, and read their best pieces for the class. The fearlessness was contagious. Each student had something to share and most had a comment or two for
their fellow poets. They quietly respected silences and cheered when a classmate took a new risk. The writers had taught them how to be a community. They welcomed them on the deeply personal, yet public experience of writing and sharing. The students lavished in the journey. They were sad to see the writers leave, but many still carried their journals in the hallways weeks later when I visited.

Conclusions and Revisions

As a teacher, I would prefer to believe that my students are perpetually safe, and their lives are not complicated by fear, sadness, or worry. However, when we read and write with our students, we are always privy to their pain. At different ages, young people comprehend more or less of the world around them. As a result, the approach we take to writing with them about this world must remember where they come from, who they are, and where they will be shortly. It is certainly amazing how a first grader might lump a variety of events into one category entitled “A Spring Day” and not comprehend the magnitude of each. Then, three short years later, that same child might recall such events with sadness and fear. Only a few more years pass, and as an eighth grader, these events help define the individual identity he or she begins to claim. Each stage carries a new understanding of self in relation to the world.

Nevertheless, something completely different occurs when, at each of these stages, children have opportunities to work with writers. When writers visit classrooms, they offer something that we as teachers cannot. They approach students with the agenda of writing. They don’t wish to protect them or be fearful for them; they wish to write with them: to share their love of words. They have years of expertise in their craft; they have been hurt and glorified by criticism; they have stood before audiences and bared their deepest fears; they have experienced the loneliness and company of words. In an age when standards and testing overrun our classroom writing, teachers no longer celebrate a narrative essay or a persuasive paper. Instead, we are pleased when our students pass by writing what the test demands. We have forgotten what it means to hone a craft for oneself and an audience of peers. Sometimes, we have to let others take the reins in order to remember.

Writers in residence programs do not guarantee students will pass the tests or write profound pieces about their lives. Yet, the gifts they offer both students and writers are profound. Such programs invite students to look at writing differently. They offer opportunities for students to use writing as navigational tools in their complicated lives. They dismiss grades, agendas, and assessments to get to the real business of writing and living: the communal experience that occurs when we begin telling our stories. Blitz and Hurlbert remind us that when students write about living, they also write about dying: the two refuse to be independent. We all experience violence, but its presence or absence does not make the story more or less profound. When we write with young people and assume nothing, we offer them the power to choose what emerges on the page.

References


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When we visit schools to talk about our picture book *Armando and the Blue Tarp School*, we take a magic wand. Students sit on a blue plastic tarp and we wave our magic wand. POOF!—The walls, ceiling, and floor disappear, leaving the students out in the open on a "blue tarp school," exposed to the hot sun or cold winds. Imaginary seagulls circle. Buzzing flies swirl around them. Students listen for the eep! eep! eep! of trash trucks backing up and think about the stench of the nearby trash dump.

The children close their eyes as we ask, “What if you and your family had to pick through trash all day to make a living? What if you longed to learn, but couldn’t go to school? And then—BUH-BEEP, BUH-BEEP!—the sound of a truck horn changed your life forever.”

With this pre-reading under their belts, we dive into reading *Armando and the Blue Tarp School*, published by award-winning publisher, Lee & Low Books. Our PowerPoint presentation shows the illustrations for this powerful story. (Using a Docucam is another way to show the art while reading.)

As happens with all writers, some ideas come from one’s ever-elusive, mysterious muse. Others, like this one, stem from real life.

When we first met David Lynch in 1985, we witnessed firsthand the power of one—the ability of one person to make a difference. While freelancing for the *Los Angeles Times*, we wrote an article about Lynch and his work teaching children who lived in a *colonia* (neighborhood) adjacent to the Tijuana city dump.

Lynch, a former special education teacher from New York, first went to Mexico in 1980, intending to stay for “just for the summer.” With no school building for classes, he simply spread a blue tarp on a patch of bare ground and that became his school.

Children flocked to learn at the blue tarp school. A few had attended the Tijuana public school, a two-mile walk one way from the *colonia* through the dump and along dirt roads. But this distance was too great for younger children to tackle. Most had never been to school before. Their daily lives were different from children around Tijuana who had the means to go to school. (Mexican students must wear uniforms that cost money.)

These *colonia* children and their families worked together every day at the dump picking through trash, tearing apart plastic bags, searching for things to sell, recycle, or use. The press has called these children “The Glass Children.” Their job was to grub in the dirt with their small fingers in search of pieces of broken glass. Their faces became smudged with dirt.
Their fingers bore cuts. In the afternoons after their work was finished, these children gathered on the blue tarp as Lynch taught outside under the blazing sun. During the rainy season, he spread the tarp over muddy ground. Still the children came. For most, this was a first-ever chance to learn.

“The children’s eagerness to learn amazed me,” Lynch notes. “Their attention never wavered, despite a constant parade of pigs, dogs, ducks, and chickens passing through their outdoor classroom.” On a biting cold December day, we visited the dump with an L.A. Times photographer. As Lynch taught at his blue tarp school, the youngsters who gathered around him touched our hearts. Some wore no shoes, and their clothes offered thin comfort from the cold. And yet, the children wanted to learn everything—words, numbers, shapes, and colors.

That day held a surprise—jars of paint. Painting was new to most of the students; they eagerly dabbed and drew, then carefully carried home their wet paintings to show their parents. We strove to show the strong familial culture of Mexican families, regardless of economic status. Though he longed for school, Armando scavenged in the dump to help his family survive—he knew it was his responsibility.

The people of the colonia understood the importance of education and had always hoped for a school for their children. That’s why, in our story, Armando’s father works out a way for Armando to attend David’s blue tarp school.

After our article appeared on December 19, 1985, our Times editor called with exciting news. The paper had received an anonymous donation earmarked for building supplies for a real school.

At last the colonia’s long-held dream could become reality. For weeks, the people worked. Saws sliced—SHUSHA-SHUSHA! Hammers pounded—BAM-BAM! From a cement foundation, up rose four sturdy walls and a roof. Light poured in through holes where windows would go.

Six months later, we returned with the same photographer to see the completed building and do a follow-up story. The colonia celebrated, its residents brimming with excitement. The children crowded inside the new school. Our second article appeared in June 1986, and its headline said it all: “Happiness is a humble one-room schoolhouse.”

Field trips were part of David’s plan. Many of his first students had never left the colonia by the dump. Local business owners in Tijuana pitched in to remedy this—the children were invited to visit an upscale Tijuana restaurant where the owner welcomed the children and gave them a grand tour. There, they watched many people at work—chefs, waiters, cleaners, opening their eyes to jobs they themselves might hold as adults. Other businesses, like a bakery, did the same.

The children had other adventures. At a Tijuana park, they rolled with delight in the lush green grass. At the beach, they saw middle class Tijuana families enjoying the sun and sand. David used his teaching skills to help children draw letters and numbers in the sand. Pulling from his years as a lifeguard and swim instructor, he taught his students how to swim.

When we reconnect with David several years ago for another tour of the colonia and the dump, we experienced an “aha” moment. This moving story had to be a book!

As writers and teachers alike know, building a book takes work. We show students draft after draft, each covered in scribbled notes. Their eyes widen when we tell them that with our “backing-and-forthing” as coauthors, we must have done 789 revisions. We explain how we created Armando, a composite character based on real children we had met and observed. Armando’s artistic bent derived from the ability of these children to appreciate beauty and find happiness amid their bleak surroundings. We borrowed characteristics from the real David Lynch to create our Señor David—such as his habit of shaking students’ hands when praising them and his positive, upbeat attitude while teaching them, replete with clapping and affirmations like, “Bueno, good job!”

David Lynch teaches colonia children inside one of his new schools.
Our plot evolved out of real events—the learning environment, a real fire in 2002 that destroyed many houses, the close-knit family groups and caring culture—but the story also took off on its own. Witnessing the pride the parents have in the children, we made Papá a kind father, who ultimately chose the best route for his son’s success. Thus, the book became a mix of realism and invention.

We knew we wanted both Spanish and English words in the story. Now when we read the story to children, we make it interactive, saying the Spanish words together, accompanied by actions or motions. With la gallina, chicken, we all fold our arms into wings and BRAWK, BRAWK, BRAWK. For el cerdo, pig, we all make wonderful piggy noises—SNORT, SNORT. We moo for la vaca, cow.

As the story evolved, our intuitive critique group listened to many versions. Then Lee & Low Books, known for its multicultural focus, took the project on and chose Hernán Sosa, a talented artist who grew up in Paraguay as illustrator. We sent photos and video footage from our many trips to the dump to help with his pre-book research. Sosa used these materials to beautifully capture the compelling setting and theme. He painted the children’s bright, open faces, helping his art portray the message that despite their impoverished situation, these children are eager to take huge steps toward creating a strong future through learning.

We draw children’s attention to the muted tones of the illustrations, which soften the harsh reality of these children’s environment. Some reviewers have called the white outline around figures and objects a “stained glass” look. As is often true with illustrators, Hernán added an element we had not written into the plot: a dog. Many scraggly dogs roam the dump, so Hernán added a walk-on part for the friendly white dog that appears often near Armando.

One fine day, our editor called with the welcome words, “That’s it! We’re finished.” The work of building the book by authors, editor, book designer, and artist was complete. The luscious moment came when boxes of books arrived, and we danced in our driveways. Two longtime supporters, actress Susan Sarandon and news anchor Bill O’Reilly, contributed blurbs for the back cover. A portion of the proceeds from book sales benefit Responsibility, Inc. (www.responsibilityonline.org), the non-profit organization that now supports the work of David Lynch.

You may be surprised to learn that an author’s work doesn’t end with publication. Today, authors also work to extend the reach of their books. We have created a web site (www.bluetarpschool.com) to spread the word. A book trailer, with music kindly provided by classical guitarist Esteban, draws people in. You’ll also find activities for students, reviews, and links.

Armando and the Blue Tarp School is a nominee for the 2009–2010 California Young Reader Medal. Schoolchildren will read and vote on their favorite book. In fall 2009, a Spanish paperback version of Armando and a children’s musical based on the book will be available.

David Lynch is now in his twenty-ninth year at the dump. Since our first visit twenty years ago, David has built four schools, the most recent one a two-story
building. He supervises eight teachers at the current school—with supplies and curriculum, art classes, and a computer lab. All of the teachers hold Mexican teaching credentials.

From the start, David Lynch has been a listener, careful not to impose his views on the people of the colonia. He listens to their thoughts about what they as a community need and sparks discussion about how this can be accomplished. Thus the residents have turned many dreams into reality.

Among the thousands of children Lynch has taught, many have met with success. One, Felipe Quiroz Gonzalez, who once sat on the blue tarp as a young boy now teaches preschoolers and kindergarteners, and acts as assistant director at the school. “Felipe is a natural teacher,” says Lynch of Gonzalez.

Other success stories abound. Much can happen in a single generation. Recently a woman came up to David and asked if he remembered her. “Of course I do,” he responded. She beamed. “I own my own bakery now,” she told him. Felipe Quiroz Gonzalez’s daughter plans to be a doctor and is making top grades. His son is a computer whiz.

Today the municipal dump adjacent to the colonia has closed. Workers now must commute twenty miles south of Tijuana to a newly opened dumpsite. The colonia where Escuela David Lynch is located has become a permanent settlement with electricity and telephones. Many individuals and major corporations have donated money so the children of the colonia can grow and learn. Thanks to other donations, the students have access to computers, adding to the vital skills that can broaden their job choices when they are older.

In November 2006, at UNICEF House at the United Nations Plaza in New York City, Lynch was honored with the World of Children Humanitarian Award, which recognizes ordinary people worldwide who do extraordinary work on behalf of children. Because of David Lynch, children living near the Tijuana dump envision futures unimaginable before his arrival. They dream of careers as lawyers, computer technicians, talk show hosts, teachers, artists, doctors, and more.

“Against all odds,” says Lynch. “The average student graduates from kindergarten one full year above grade level.” These children now know that learning can change their lives. As Lynch tells them, “the decision is yours. It’s your responsibility.”

Through the vision and persistence of David Lynch, and the strong support of families in the colonia, thousands of young children and their families have been touched by hope. The gift of hope. The gift of responsibility.

Now that you know the story behind the story, we hope that through this book, you’ll help young readers recognize that thousands of amazing individuals quietly do vital, positive work in this world. Strong role models build strong character. Positive action increases children’s confidence. Walking in others’ shoes creates a feeling of empathy. As authors, this book has given us a chance to put into writing what we both believe strongly: One person can make a difference. For us, David Lynch perfectly exemplifies the power of one. And the colonia residents show that given the tools, people can take charge of their own lives.

This piece is based on an article that first appeared in The California Reader, the journal of the California Reading Association.
Digging Deeper:

Classroom Activities for Armando and the Blue Tarp School

Here are some ways you can extend the reading of Armando in your classroom and guide your students to become active learners. You and your children will come up with more.

LISTEN

• While reading the story of the story of Armando, say, "Put yourself in his place."
• Have students do a two-minute cluster on Armando’s neighborhood. Think of the five senses.
• Ask students to make a cluster about their neighborhood.

THINK and DISCUSS

Explain that empathy is understanding what other people are thinking or feeling. Ask students to talk about questions such as these:

• What did Armando long for? What words tell you that?
• How did Senor David show he cared about Armando and the other children?
• What do you and Armando have in common?
• What is the same and different about your home, your school, your life?
• What do you think made Señor David decide to stay for so many years?

THEME

A theme is the unspoken “glue” of the story, the message that the story gives.

• Ask students what they think the theme of Armando and the Blue Tarp School is.

CHARACTERS

Ask questions about the book’s characters to students.

• Who is the main character(s)?
• Which characters support the main character?
• How did Isabella help Armando?
• Are there any characters who say nothing, but are part of the story?
• At first, what does Papá say about Armando attending Señor David’s school?
• What changes Papá’s mind?
• At the end of the story, what does Papá do that makes Armando happy?

LOOK CLOSER AT THE WORDS

• What do you think the last line means? “I am happy from here to the sky.”
• Why does Papá say, “Do not fill your head with dreams of school . . . I wish things could be different. But we are pepenadores, trash pickers. You must do the work of our family.”
• Listen for phrases that repeat, such as “Down the dirt road, across the wobbly plank.”
• Which words or actions show you that Armando is sad? Happy? Frightened?

PLOT

• How did things change for Armando after Señor David came?
• What is the most dramatic part of the story?
• What does Armando do that results in a happy ending?

TRANSITIONS

• Listen for phrases that show the passage of time or take you from one paragraph to another, like “and then,” “later,” “in the morning.”

SENTENCE VARIETY

• Find sentences with different forms.
Some are short (especially during the fast action of the fire).
Some are longer.
Some sentences start with a simple subject-verb.
Others are more complicated, with a clause/subject/verb pattern or starting with a prepositional phrase.

ART

• Make an illustrated Word Book like Armando’s with words in two languages.
(See the glossary on the book’s last page.)
• Create a collage of recycled scraps.
• Build “recycled” sculptures, like this one, using cardboard tubes, cans, paper scraps, old yarn, and other found materials.
• Study Hernán Sosa’s artwork. Draw a picture using his “stained glass” method of outlining shapes in white.
• Name your art piece and sign it. Artists do.
• RECYCLE
Be a roving recycler. Collect and recycle cans, plastic bottles, and paper:
At home
At school
In your neighborhood

COOK
• Make and taste typical Mexican dishes—yum! Search a kids’ cookbook or the Internet for recipes for the dishes below.
Homemade salsa
Guacamole
Tortilla soup
Quesadillas
Sweets—flan, bañuelos

EXPLORE MUSIC
• Sing and dance to Mexican music.
• Make maracas with dry beans in a cardboard tube.
• Learn about the instruments in mariachi bands.
• Find some typical Mexican songs.
• Make up a song using the Spanish numbers one to ten or other Spanish words.

PLAY WITH WORDS
You won’t find BUH-BEEP! OR EEP-EEP-EEP! in a dictionary.
• Have fun making up spellings for sounds you hear every day.
   —A SHOOOSH of dry leaves
   —The VROOM of a jet

—A CRAAAACK of thunder
—The SKREEEK of a rusty gate hinge
—The SKRAAWWK of a crow
• Learn words like hello, good-bye, please, and thank you in other languages, such as Spanish, Japanese, French, Mandarin, Arabic, Tagalog.
• Make flashcards like the ones in the book using the glossary at the back of the book.

TO DO
Have Children Read and Compare Armando and the Blue Tarp School to books with a similar theme, such as The Gold Coin by Alma Flor Ada, or similar setting, such as Friends from the Other Side by Gloria Anzaldúa and Consuelo Mendez, The Birthday Swap by Loretta Lopez, The Pot That Juan Built by Nancy Andrews-Goebel, Poems to Dream Together by Francisco X. Alarcón, Yum! ¡MmMm! ¡Qué rico! by Pat Mora.

DISCUSSION PROMPT
Every person can make a difference. President Barack Obama has asked each of us to help people in need in any way we can. What are some things you could do? Walk an elderly neighbor’s dog? Run an errand for a neighbor? Do you have toys or games another child or a day care center could use?

One ten-year-old girl realized that foster children often had no suitcases. The first year, she collected 300. With help from others, she has now collected 17,000 suitcases. Another child got donated books from friends for a school that had few books. One fourth grade class put on a production to raise money to help people in Africa. Other classes have written to soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan.

WRITING PROMPT
Do you have a story to tell? Is there something you’ve done in your life to help others or something that changed the way you think about things? First make a cluster and brainstorm about what you saw, felt, heard, and did when you helped someone. Describe what the person (people) needed and how you decided to help. Then weave a story about your experience.

Judith Pinkerton Josephson and Edith Hope Fine, both former teachers, are writers with thirty books between them. Judith has written numerous biographies, the latest about Nelson Mandela, and a childhood history series. Edith’s books include Under the Lemon Moon and CryptoMania: Teleporting into Greek and Latin with the CryptoKids. Fine and Josephson are co-authors of Nitty-Gritty Grammar and More Nitty-Gritty Grammar, two light-hearted grammar guides, and Armando and the Blue Tarp School. Both live near San Diego; however, both have Ohio connections. Judith was awarded a Masters Degree from The Ohio State University and Edith attended Ohio Wesleyan University. For more information, visit www.bluetarp school.com, www.responsibilityonline.org, www.EdithFine.com, and www.JudithJosephson.com.
Reading and Responding to Children’s Books About Bullying

Which of the following scenarios is an example of bullying?

A. Older boys repeatedly steal a second-grader’s lunch money.

B. A group of girls start and perpetuate vicious rumors about a shy classmate.

C. On a daily basis, a boy makes fun of a peer’s old-fashioned clothes.

D. During recess, bigger kids push, shove, and taunt smaller children.

E. All of the above.

If you guessed E, you not only know a lot about test construction, you also understand the classic definition of bullying: “Bullying is a deliberate attempt to hurt another that is repeated over time,” (Craig, 1997, p. 123). Each scenario above contains a truth about bullying: bullies tend to be older and/or bigger than their victims; bullying involves both physical and verbal abuse; victims are usually different in some way from their peers, whether it involves dress, size, language, or social skills; and bullying occurs most frequently on the playground or in isolated locations where there is no adult supervision (Craig, 1997; Olweus, 1993).

Addressing the parameters of bullying in schools; studying the characteristics of victims, bullies, and bystanders; and examining successful school wide anti-bullying programs laid the foundation for this project involving third and fourth graders and books about bullying.

Parameters of bullying

Bullying remains a serious problem in many elementary schools, and children of every age have been the target of bullies or have witnessed bullying. In fact, one in seven children has been a bully or a victim; the remainder are bystanders. Bullying involves an imbalance of strength, a negative action (either physical or verbal), and a deliberate, repeated attempt to hurt another person (Craig, 1997). For the bully to feel powerful, he/she must see evidence that the victim is indeed intimidated, humiliated, hurt, or controlled. Physical bullying seems to increase through elementary school and peak in the junior high years, but incidents of verbal abuse remain constant. Examples of verbal bullying include name-calling, taunting or teasing, and starting rumors. School size, racial composition, and school setting (rural, urban, or suburban) have no relationship to frequency of bullying (Banks, 1997). While more boys than girls are physical bullies, as many girls participate in verbal assault or retaliation against a classmate in an attempt to isolate their victims. When victims don’t defend themselves, bullying may escalate or carry on for years (Olweus, 1993).

Victims

What do we know about the victims? Children who are perpetual victims of bullying tend to share
certain characteristics. They are generally smaller and weaker than their peer group (Olweus, 1973). While victims may be poorer students, it is difficult to determine whether this is the cause of bullying or an effect of it. Victims are also more likely to have a submissive or passive response to aggression and to appear overly needy to their peer group (Bernstein & Watson, 1997). Children who are the victims of bullying are often social isolates; however, this may be because other children are afraid to associate with them for fear of becoming a victim themselves. A reluctance to respond to bullying fuels the notion that somehow the children who are bullied are at fault (DeHaan, 1997).

There can be long-term effects for victims that include anxiety, embarrassment, guilt, loneliness, panic attacks, and sleep disorders (DeHann, 1997). Children who are bullied see school as an unsafe and unhappy place. Being bullied can lead to low self-esteem and depression later in life (Batsche & Knopf, 1994).

Perry, Williard, & Perry (1990) surveyed fourth graders and concluded that children could easily identify who in their class would be victimized by a bully. Fortunately, when the characteristics that make children likely to be victims are identified in children, early intervention programs can reduce their victimization and help children develop more self-confidence and social skills (Bernstein & Watson, 1997). Children can be encouraged to tell someone if they are being bullied, to learn to act more confidently by taking a martial arts or yoga class or by developing skills in art, music, computers, or by joining a club to make friends (New, 2007).

Bullies

Not surprisingly, bullies also share common, identifiable qualities. Boys who bully are usually older and bigger than their victims and are not as strong academically. Contrary to prevailing myths that bullies have low opinions of themselves, children who bully are more likely to have high self-esteem and suffer less anxiety and insecurity than their peers (Olweus, 1993). In general, they are disciplined more physically at home and lack empathy skills (Viadero, 1997).

Unlike their male counterparts, size and age are not determining factors when girls are the bullies, and female antagonists usually do better on intelligence tests and have higher grades than other children. Neither male nor female bullies have empathy for their victims, and both are more likely to be aggressive and have the need to dominate others (Olweus, 1993). Bullies select as their victims children who are less likely to retaliate (Bernstein & Watson, 1997).

Some feel being a chronic bully can have negative long-term consequences. Bullies more frequently continue the aggressive behavior as adults that leads to criminal arrests and they lack the ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships (Banks, 1997). They generally have friends who encourage risky, aggressive behavior and fail to develop a mature sense of social justice (Watkins, 2007). Former bullies are at risk for becoming uncaring, punitive parents whose children in turn become bullies (Goleman, 1987).

Bullies can benefit from efforts to understand their own behavior and to learn healthier ways of dealing with other children. Finding ways to channel aggression through productive means such as sports or theatre may be a productive approach. Talking with a mentor or counsellor can help bullies begin to understand their behavior and its impact on others and to take initial steps to develop empathy. Providing meaningful apologies to their victims and making
reparations for damaged property can have an impact on the ability of bullies to take responsibilities for their actions (Watkins, 2007).

**Bystanders**

Those who are bystanders when bullying takes place also play a role. Students or adults who don't initiate bullying but who stand back and watch it or laugh are encouraging this aggressive behavior. In a survey of students, Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler (1994) found that a clear majority of children felt that victims were somehow responsible for being bullied. They stated that bullying toughened a person and taught him/her appropriate behavior. Victims were characterized as students who were ‘weak’ or ‘afraid to fight back’.

When school personnel view bullying as a harmless rite of passage they contribute to the continuation of aggressive behavior (Banks, 1997). In fact, Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler (1995) concluded that few children believed that adults would help those who were bullied and that if adults did intervene, they would only make things worse. Children reported that teachers seldom or never talked to their classes about bullying at all.

Unfortunately, if children who see bullying notice that there are no consequences for the bully, they may become aggressive and blame the victim (Viadero, 1997). Therefore, teachers and adults must be proactive and reactive in matters of bullying and must make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated and that victims and bystanders will have support.

**School wide intervention programs**

Bullying occurs in a social context in which teachers and parents may be unaware and children are reluctant to get involved (Charach et al., 1995). For school wide intervention programs to be effective, they must not merely focus on victims, bullies, and bystanders but must involve the entire school community. Smith and Sharp (1994) recommend establishing policies about bullying and its consequences, curricular attention to the topic, improving the school environments, and empowering students by teaching conflict resolution, peer counselling, and assertiveness training. Olweus (1993) adds further recommendations: involving parents in supporting anti-bullying efforts, and having teachers develop rules against bullying in their classes and employing role-playing and the use of cooperative learning activities to reduce social isolation. Increasing adult supervision on the playground and at lunch also reduces opportunities to bully.

Children’s literature can initiate important classroom discussions of bullying. Books can provide a source of relief from the worries of bullying (Cionciolo, 1965) and can give students strategies for dealing successfully with bullies (Tietjen, 1980). When teachers read books that deal with bullying to children, it provides an opportunity for in depth discussions. Children can explore their feelings as they discuss how it feels to be bullied and how bullying can be stopped (Galda & Cullinan, 2002). While bullying may seem too significant a societal problem for young children to address, an African proverb tells us: “If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a room with a mosquito.”

**The project**

This project had two components: First, following a discussion about bullying that enabled students in third and fourth grade to discuss examples from their own lives, learners listened, discussed and responded to books about bullying. Second, the students compiled lists of Do’s and Don’ts for dealing with bullying.

One title used for this project, *The Bully Blockers Club* (Bateman, 2004), is a story about a group of children who have been bothered by a bully. To solve their problem, they decide to form a club (The
Bully Blockers Club) and every time the bully tries to bother them, one of the club members confronts the bully and in so doing they alert the teacher of the bully’s behavior. Eventually the bully wants to join the club, and the children teach him an important lesson about tolerance.

In another title used for this project, Loud Mouth George and the Sixth-Grade Bully (Carlson, 1983), George tricks the bully who keeps stealing his lunch by making him a horrible, disgusting lunch. After reading these books together and discussing them, the children voted on the book in which the main character dealt with the bully in the best way.

The results are shown in Figures 1 and 2, along with students’ written rationale for their votes.

**Figure 1: 3rd graders’ votes and rationale on which book character handled the bully better:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11 Votes</th>
<th>The Bully Blockers Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“She told her parents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“I think if you made a bad lunch they will probably tell their Mom and Dad”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“I like this book because they didn’t hurt or make someone cry”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They didn’t hit the bully when he took stuff from other kids. They said, “What are you doing?””</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They made a club of bullies and if somebody is picking on someone and they could fix the problem”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“Because they didn’t trick the bully”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They don’t do bad stuff to make him sick”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“In this story they didn’t harm the bully”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“Because they made a club and when they see the bully they always say, ‘Hey, what are you doing?’ That’s my opinion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They made a club and if they are taking your things then your club will come and say, ‘What are you doing? Then the teacher might hear and the bully is going to get in trouble”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They made a club and had a lot of people in it”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 Votes</th>
<th>Loudmouth George and the Sixth Grade Bully</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“I like this book. It is cool”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2: 4th graders’ votes and rationale on which book character handled the bully better:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>17 Votes</th>
<th>The Bully Blockers Club</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“It’s a way to get them in trouble”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They didn’t hurt the bully in any way”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“I think this is a better one because you get in more fights if you gave someone a gross lunch. You can’t cause trouble making a club”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“The way they handled it was not harmful and it couldn’t make a person sick”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They didn’t hurt the bully or do anything mean. The friends helped and were a team”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“It will let you have more defense and you won’t have to worry”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“You’re actually solving the problem than making another problem in the other story”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They had proof that he was bullying”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“It was funny and it was longer than the first story”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“There’s a bigger chance of the bully getting in trouble”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They didn’t hurt the bully or do anything mean. The friends helped and were a team”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They didn’t get back at the bully”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“In this book they would help other people who the bully was picking on”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“It deals with the bully in a peaceful way and not being the bully”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“If a bully gets in my way, my friend helps me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They dealt with the problem and made sure everybody couldn’t get bullied”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They told an adult”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 Votes</th>
<th>Loudmouth George and the Sixth Grade Bully</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“I liked that they worked as a team”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“He probably won’t take the lunch again, plus Lance will be there if he does”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“Making a horrible lunch is like saying stop to the bully secretly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“I like making gross stuff for people’s meals”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They made him stop doing what he was doing. And I also liked how they worked as a team”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“They made the bully a terrible lunch”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>“I think that would teach the bully not to take his lunch any more”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, students wrote about bullying and dealing with bullies after reading and discussing the bullying books. The following Do’s and Don’ts of bullying came from students after hearing *Say Something* (Moss, 2004). The students’ Do’s and Don’ts paralleled the recommendations of New (2007). She identified specific ways for students to prevent a run-in with a bully and strategies to apply when being bullied. Her suggestions and a sample of the corresponding Do’s and Don’ts from the third and fourth graders are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Research Says...</th>
<th>The Students Suggest...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preventing a run-in with a bully</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| *Don’t give the bully a chance.* As much as you can, avoid the bully. | • Do ignore the bullies  
• Remember not to stay and don’t just play |
| *Stand tall and be brave.* Sometimes just acting brave is enough to stop a bully. | • Do ask them to stop  
• Remember to defend, don’t delay |
| *Get a buddy and be a buddy.* Two is better than one if you’re trying to avoid being bullied. Get involved if you see bullying going on in your school. | • Have a buddy  
• Do help others when they are bullied |
| **If the bully says or does something to you** | |
| *Ignore the bully.* Try to ignore what a bully says. Pretend you don’t hear and walk to a safe place. | • Walk away  
• Do try to ignore the bully for the day |
| *Stand up for yourself.* Pretend to be brave and confident. Tell the bully, “No!” and “Stop it!” in a loud voice. Stand up for someone else who is being bullied. | • Tell them to stop and that you don’t like it  
• Look them in the eye  
• Stand up for yourself  
• Do try to say, ‘Stop bothering me’  
• Remember to end the bullying with words not fists  
• Remember to speak with courage  
• Remember to defend, don’t delay |
| *Don’t bully back.* Fighting just makes the bully happy and can be dangerous for you. | • Don’t become the bully because then you will hurt other people’s feelings  
• Don’t make the bully get madder at you  
• Don’t hurt them back!  
• Don’t be the bully! That includes saying bad words or punching them  
• The important thing about dealing with bullies is not to do dangerous things to them  
• Remember to not become the evil cruel bully  
• Do be kind to them because they probably never had a friend  
• Don’t make your friends fight the bully  
• Remember to not become the evil cruel bully  
• Do be kind to them because they probably never had a friend  
• Don’t make your friends fight the bully |
| *Don’t show your feelings.* Don’t show that you are angry or upset. | • Remember to stay calm  
• Don’t get aggressive |
| *Tell an adult.* Find someone you trust and tell them what is happening. | • Do tell someone about your problem  
• Do inform somebody if someone’s getting bullied  
• But the important thing about dealing with bullies is to tell someone!!!  
• Remember to always tell someone |
Discussion of the results

The students shared many insights as the project proved to be a successful method of initiating a classroom discussion of bullying, an essential component of successful, school wide intervention programs identified in the research (Olweus, 1993; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Students in the third and fourth grade classrooms contributed personal stories from their own lives about bullying. They were reminded that bullying can be both physical and verbal and talked about how it felt to be bullied. The discussion about the different ways to handle bullying behavior was productive. Students talked extensively about being nice to everyone so that no one feels excluded and would consequently be tempted to exhibit bullying behavior. They discussed strategies they might employ for handling future bullying issues themselves and the importance of speaking up when bullying happens.

Third graders overwhelmingly preferred the strategies for dealing with bullies described in the Bully Blockers Club. Working as a team appealed to them and they responded that hurting the bully back was not effective. More fourth graders than third graders liked the retaliatory story of Loudmouth George and the Sixth-Grade Bully. The component of revenge against an older student who was stealing George’s lunch every day appealed to them, although they still liked the Bully Blocker Club better. When asked to develop their own lists of ways to deal with bullies, student responses paralleled what the research tells us is effective.

In addition to the two books used in this project about bullying, there are other picture books that can spark important conversations about this very real issue. (A recommended list of books is included at the end of this article.)

Conclusion

Bullying remains a serious issue in our schools today. Reading and discussing books that deal with this problem is one way to start the conversation about appropriate ways to respond to and deal with bullies. Talking and writing about characters’ choices help students learn about their own possible solutions to dealing with bullying problems. With the help of an informed, compassionate adult, bullies can begin to develop empathy skills, victims can acquire strategies that will help them deal with bullies, and bystanders can realize the important role they have in preventing this aggressive, taunting behavior. In the words of Thom Harnett, a Civil Rights Attorney “One person speaking up makes more noise than a thousand people who remain silent.”

Children’s Books mentioned


Recommended Children’s Books About Bullying


References


**Dr. Danielson** is a professor in the Teacher Education Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha where she teaches literacy classes.

**Dr. LaBonty** is a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Montana where she teaches literacy classes.

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*OJELA* is looking for more than just great authors …

We’re looking for great artists, too!

Do you have students’ work, pictures or original art that capture the spirit of student life? Do you have photographs of your students or classroom that reflect the themes of future OJELA issues? Have you saved some great action photographs that illustrate best practice in reading, writing and teaching English language arts? If so, consider submitting them for publication in a future issue of OJELA!

Paintings, drawings, cartoons, photographs—your submissions could appear on OJELA’s cover or within its text as illustrations.

For more information email Marge Ford at margeford@gmail.com.

See page 2 — Call for Manuscripts for specific themes of future issues.
What? Write Worse: Assessing Student Writing from Both Ends of the Continuum

“W

hat? Write worse?”

Giggles emanated from some of my fourth grade students, while other faces showed they could not believe what they heard. “You mean write sloppy?” “Spell words wrong?” “Should we like not put in periods or capital letters?” Always, always, the same answer was given to their queries: “If you think that is what makes writing worse then go ahead and do that. Just be sure that when you are done writing you make a list of all the things you did to make your writing worse.” Finally, the chatter died down and the writing started.

Some students wrote exactly the same piece they had written previously, only making this one sloppier. Others, when they remembered, would misspell a word or two. Some would start a sentence without a capital letter and/or leave out the end punctuation.

But there were some students who did other things. These students would leave out some of the details they had in their first drafts. They repeated words, or used words that were less descriptive instead. These students used pronouns where nouns would have made the message clearer. They tried to make their writing more confusing. Sometimes, they tried to be rude or flippant towards their audience. They changed their voice.

Why do an assignment that asks students to do less than their best? Can we learn any more from students un-doing what they did to make their writing good? Will writing a worse draft help students to write better in the end? And does thinking about how one goes about using writing strategies to make writing better or worse help? Is the Make-It-Better/Make-It-Worse Protocol (Andrews-Beck, 1989) a fruitful way of learning more about students’ writing?

American fourth grade students’ educational gains continue to be compared to those made by students of similar age throughout the world by the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP] (U. S. Department of Education, 2006) and The International Measurement of Math and Science [TIMMS] (Bracey, 2005). Even prior to Public Law 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), many states in our country used fourth grade as a group by which to measure proficiency in writing, reading, and mathematics (for example, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills [TAAS] given to fourth grade students in Texas and the Ohio Proficiency Test given to fourth grade students in Ohio). A profile of fourth grade students’ knowledge of these subject areas is then constructed as a result of this one-shot testing, which does not allow for students to show knowledge and skills they possess but that are not asked for by the testing prompts. Educational policy makers do not get an accurate picture from these test results of the knowledge about writing that fourth grade students do indeed have. It is also difficult for classroom teachers to base needed writing intervention for their students on the results of this type of testing (DeBenedictis, 2006, p. 1). The Make-It-Better/Make-It-Worse Protocol (MIB/MIW) may be one way for educators and the students, themselves,
to gain a more complete picture of what these young adolescents do indeed know about writing.

**What the research says**

Bracewell (1983) suggested asking children to write worse in addition to as well as they can in order to assess their metacognitive control of writing processes, that is “the deliberate manipulation by the writer of whatever mental and physical activities that lead to the production of text” (p. 178). He theorized “the metacognitively skilled writer should be able to produce both good and bad versions of text on the same topic” (p. 183).

Following Bracewell, Andrews-Beck (1989) used a Make-It-Better/Make-It-Worse strategy with eighth grade students and then asked them to reflect on the changes made in order to gain better insight into the “ways student writers think about, talk about, and demonstrate revising skills in the process of writing “ (p. 2). She found that “the degree to which they were able to vary texts widely and to articulate those changes suggested that the worse-better methodology enabled those writers to display competencies and gaps in metacognitive skill and metacognitive knowledge that may not otherwise have been revealed” (p. 192).

The National Writing Project at Kent State University conducted a local research site initiative, which included using the Make-It-Better/Make-It-Worse Protocol with students in grades 5-12 (excluding seventh grade). These researchers were able to determine over which writing strategies students had control by looking at what students specifically did to make their writing better, and then seeing if they did the opposite of that strategy in their worse draft (McCracken, Bruce, Manna, Sewell, & DeBenedictis, 2004).

**Using MIB/MIW in Different Contexts**

Often, when we ask students to revise their writing, implying the need to make it better, they make superficial attempts to do so by writing neater and checking spelling, capitals, and punctuation (Bridwell, 1980). This is sometimes due to the fact that students may have done much of the revision in their heads as they were writing their original draft (Flower & Hayes, 1981). We may, sometimes incorrectly, conclude that our students do not have a complete understanding of the writing process (DeBenedictis, 2006, p. 3). The MIW gives students another chance to name strategies they know about good writing, but do not think to name in the MIB. Sometimes, because of fatigue or motivation, students merely recopy what they write in their original draft, as Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) found, and so a teacher cannot tell if the students know anything about revision.

The following section takes a look at the writing of three fourth grade students to see how their use of the MIB/MIW Protocol gave me further insight into the metacognition of these young adolescents.

**My Fourth Grade Class**

My fourth-grade students attended a K-4th grade school in a northeast Ohio suburban community. These students covered a range of abilities and exhibited a variety of characteristics regarding their writing cognition and metacognition. Every afternoon, students spent 20 minutes in quiet reading, writing, and/or drawing time, as did any parents who chose to come in and participate, thus serving as role models. Afterwards, students and parents discussed what they were reading, writing, and/or drawing. In fact, these students regularly engaged in talk with each other throughout all aspects of their academic day, and especially when engaged in any part of the writing process. The importance of talk in writing and writing revision is well documented (Calkins, 1994; Elbow, 1973; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Graves, 1994; Routman, 2005). I also regularly allowed my students choice in deciding their writing genre and topic. These young adolescents lived in a metacognitive classroom environment; that is, they were used to reflecting upon their learning.

**The assignments**

Throughout the 2004-2005 school year, I gave my students five assignments in which they used the MIB/MIW Protocol, along with listing strategies used for making their writing better or worse. Following is a brief explanation of the two prompts for which student writing is shown in this article:

- November Narrative—Students wrote in response to a 4-frame, wordless Peanuts cartoon. The next day they were
asked to look at their initial writing and make it worse. Afterwards, they were asked to make a list of what they did to make their writing worse. On the third day, students were handed back their original writing, and asked, this time, to make it better, along with making a list of what they did to make their writing better.

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**November Persuasive Letter**—Students were to write a persuasive letter to one of the Presidential candidates concerning one or two issues that were important to them. Two weeks later, students were asked to look at this original persuasive letter, and make it worse, along with listing what strategies they used to make their writing worse. To help with the worse/better concept, I drew a horizontal line on the board, with the words ‘happy’ and ‘not happy’ at either end. Using this continuum, we discussed the varying degrees of happiness with one’s written work. On the same day, students were also asked to make their writing better and list strategies used.

While I read and assessed all of my students’ writing during the school year, I chose six students—three boys and three girls—whose work I typed into charts and conducted further analysis. This small group would make my work load manageable; I also chose students who would represent the general class make-up. Analyzing these six students’ writing to these prompts using the MIB/MIW Protocol enabled me to gain additional information about their writing metacognition:

1. Using all 3 drafts (original, MIW, MIB) I was able to see over which strategies students had control; that is, they could consciously manipulate a particular strategy (whether or not they named the skill in their reflections);

2. Again, using all three drafts, I was able to see which strategies were in-transition for students, that is, those they could use sometimes, but did not necessarily have control over, what Vygotsky (1962) called their zone of proximal development;

3. I was able to gain additional information about students’ writing skills from the MIW draft that I would not have known had they only revised in one direction—making it better;

4. The reflections showed me over which strategies students had both metacognitive skill and knowledge, and those for which they had metacognitive knowledge, but not yet the skill.

Following is a look into three of my fourth grade student writers. Space does not allow the use of all six students, and I believe that these three aptly show what can be learned from using this strategy. Likewise, while writing from two prompts are shown for Anthony, only one prompt is shown for the other two students.

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### Student Vignettes

**Anthony**

Anthony often fell asleep in class, and more often than not had his head down on his desk or stared into space. Anthony did not pass the state reading achievement test the previous year, and so was receiving small group tutoring in a pull-out program, four times a week for 20 minutes each time. When in class, Anthony rarely participated in any class discussions; he rarely talked to anyone the first month of school. Anthony had difficulty with gross and fine motor skills. He had trouble printing, and could not use cursive at all, no matter how hard he tried. His writing usually had no punctuation until the very end. However, Anthony’s writing did exhibit a delightful style or voice (Romano, 2004). He had a sophisticated vocabulary and a mature sense of humor.

The charts (Table 1 and 2) show Anthony’s original, worse and better drafts for the November Peanuts and the persuasive assignments. The chart emerged out of an obvious need to see the original, MIB and MIW drafts of each student side-by-side. The chart also shows what Anthony listed as ways he made his writing better or worse, with the most important one being listed first. The letter Y, standing for Yes, appears after named strategies that Anthony actually used in the MIB and MIW writing. N for No indicates that Anthony did not use the named strategy in the actual writing.
What? Write Worse: Assessing Student Writing from Both Ends of the Continuum

Table 1. Anthony’s Peanuts Cartoon Narrative, November 2004 *(Rows 6 and 11 are intentionally left blank to compare this chart with another assignment.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original (Acceptable print)</th>
<th>MIW (Sloppy print)</th>
<th>MIB (Neater print)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is kid named Lines</td>
<td>1. THERE IS KID NAMED LINES.</td>
<td>1. There is a kid named Lineus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. he was just walking along minding his own busnis</td>
<td>2. HE was Just walking ALONG minding his own busnis</td>
<td>2. he was just walking along minding his own busnis*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. and he stoped to Read the sighn</td>
<td>4. an he stoped ot READ the sighn</td>
<td>4. and he stoped to Read the sighn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The sighn said BEWARE of the dog.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5. The sighn BEWARE of the dog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>6.</td>
<td>6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Then he started walking again</td>
<td>7. then He started walking again</td>
<td>7. Then he started waking again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. a dog saw him</td>
<td>8. and dog saw him</td>
<td>8. A dog saw him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. and guess who that dog was ……Snoopy</td>
<td>9.</td>
<td>9. and guess who that dog was ……Snoopy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>11.</td>
<td>11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I guess he should have licined to the sighn</td>
<td>12. I guess he should hav licined to the sighn.</td>
<td>12. I guess he should hav licined to the sighn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I did to make it worse (most important*)</td>
<td>What I did to make it better (most important*)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backwerds writing* (Y)</td>
<td>Better handwriting* (Y)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big writing (Y)</td>
<td>Preat’s (Y)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not writing the whole thing (Y)</td>
<td>discripsen (same as original)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MIW used with MIB shows Anthony can control
- Neatness
- Control of detail use; lines 5 and 9
- Periods—there is 1 in the original, 2 in the MIW, and 5 in the MIB

What MIW shows that MIB doesn’t
- Anthony is aware of the importance of details

- With only the MIB draft, I would have known that Anthony was able to edit his writing for end punctuation, and that he could print a little neater when he tried. I would not, however, have realized Anthony’s understanding of the importance of details so early in the school year.
Table 2. *Anthony's November Persuasive Writing, 2004*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original (ok print)</th>
<th>MIW (sloppy print)</th>
<th>MIB (ok print)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dear president Bush</td>
<td>1. Dear president Bush</td>
<td>1. Dear president Bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. they say you are not on aAmaricas sid,</td>
<td>2. they SoY You are not on the disco I deet JapenYs teem are you</td>
<td>2. You are such a good president I mean it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. but Your Realy tring to make the state a better place ame’t You.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. you have done nothing but make the contrey a beder place and you hav had lot’s of good Idea for the contrey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Don’t You want the war agent’s America and Irak to end</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. I hope this war you started end’s soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. weach contry is doning there best</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. hope we win.</td>
<td>6. not that Im scared or AnYthing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. sinc (First/middle last names)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you wan’t wepons in Ohio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I wish all wepons were destrod exseped the one’s we need in war’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. and for cops and stuff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. We need exgre Jail sel’s if we run out of them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. We apsolutely couldn’t possubly allow sigeret’s and all the other stuff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I hop we fixe the problem’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. sincerelyaly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. you also have a desk that is so dirty that it is good unuf to be paper on a dirty bolder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. your name is a boosh and this is for you O you O (picture of mouth with tongue out) PPPLLLLLLL</td>
<td>What I did to make it worse (most important*)</td>
<td>What I did to make it better (most important*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I did to make it worse (most important*)</td>
<td>I went toty of the subject (Y)</td>
<td>I told good thing’s adout him (Y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and I made a funny picter of a mouth with it’s tung out and it going pppLLLLLL (Y)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I mad fun of his name and his desk. (Y)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MIW used with MIB shows that Anthony can control
- Tone (what some call style or voice)
- Addressing audience
- Use of details

What MIW shows that MIB doesn’t
- Understands what is inappropriate when addressing his audience
- Use of visuals to be inappropriate

While the MIB draft shows that Anthony has voice in his writing, the MIW shows that he can effectively control his voice, choosing when to be appropriate or inappropriate. The MIW also showed that Anthony consciously used illustrations as a way to make his writing worse.

Jerry

Jerry was born in northern Europe and moved with his family to the West Coast of the U.S. when he was in kindergarten. He relocated to our school district during third grade. Jerry spoke and wrote fluent English. In addition, he had fairly good comprehension of what he read. However, he did leave our classroom during language arts for 20 minutes, twice weekly, to work with the speech teacher on his /r/ sound. Jerry was a logical thinker, and his favorite class was math, where he excelled. The chart (Table 3) shows Jerry’s writing to the November persuasive prompt.

Table 3. Jerry’s November persuasive writing, November 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original (ok print) 10/26/04</th>
<th>MIW (ok print) 11/10/04</th>
<th>MIB (neat print) 11/10/04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dear President Bush,</td>
<td>1. Dear President Bush,</td>
<td>1. Dear President Bush,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2. (indented) How are you? I am fine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I think you should make people not smoke</td>
<td>3. I think you should make people not smoke.</td>
<td>3. I think you should make people not smoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. because people could get cancer and die from it.</td>
<td>4. because people could get cancer and die from it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. You should make it so people don’t drink beer or wine</td>
<td>5. You should make it so people don’t drink beer or wine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. so people could live longer and people wouldn’t die early.</td>
<td>6. so people could live longer and people won’t die early.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I think you should make the hunting season shorter</td>
<td>7. (indented) I think you should make the hunting season shorter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. because if everybody goes hunting there will be no more animals</td>
<td>8. because if everybody goes hunting there will be no more animals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. to have like deers and gooses.</td>
<td>9. to see like Deers, Geese, and Squidles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I think there should be no more guns</td>
<td>10. I think there should be no more guns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. (indented) I think there should be no more guns</td>
<td>11. because then there would be no more bad guys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. and everybody wouldn’t worry about there house getting robbed</td>
<td>12. and everybody wouldn’t worry about there house getting robbed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. so they could go somewhere with out worrying about there house getting robbed.</td>
<td>13. so they could go somewhere without worrying about there house getting robbed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. First/last name</td>
<td>15. First name</td>
<td>15. First/last name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What I did to make it worse (most important*)

What I did to make it better (most important*)

Made it shorter (Y)

I made paragraphs with every issue. * I did it by thinking of a story when you start talking about something new. (Y)

No reasons for opinion* (Y)
MIW used with MIB shows Jerry can control
- Capitalization (line 1)
- Letter format, signature (line 15)
What MIW shows that MIB doesn’t
- Jerry is aware of the importance of details and
- Giving reasons for opinions
Without the MIW I would not have known that Jerry sees the importance of, and can consciously manipulate, the strategy of using details and giving reasons for opinions. The MIW, used without the MIW, showed little more than the fact that Jerry used paragraphs to revise his original composition.

Maggie

Maggie entered my classroom as a linguistic learner. She loved to read, write, and draw. From the beginning, Maggie’s voice came through in all of her imaginative and creative writing. She often made use of dialogue and figurative speech. Her mother and father, who applauded Maggie’s creativity, but hoped she would learn to pay closer attention to spelling, nurtured writing at home. The chart (Table 4) shows Maggie’s writing to the November persuasive prompt.

Table 4. Maggie’s persuasive writing; November 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original (neat print) 10/26/04</th>
<th>MIW (sloppy print) 11/10/04</th>
<th>MIB (ok print) 11/10/04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Dear George Bush,</td>
<td>2. DEAR Pws. Bush, (with picture on side and word you above it)</td>
<td>2. Dear Presedent Bush,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (skips line instead of indent) My class is writing about issues, in the world by reading the (name of local newspaper).</td>
<td>3. My class is Reading The Paper. and there a lot of Ishuses.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. As I’m Reading, Im Finding Issues Myself.</td>
<td>4. I Have Ishu’s</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. One is air polution.</td>
<td>5. One is AWR Powutn.</td>
<td>5. One is air Polution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Even thouh the air polution mark is at 38, we’re Fine.</td>
<td>6. 38 is were at.</td>
<td>6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I know whut happens, but would You have us evacuate or stay here in Ohio?</td>
<td>8.</td>
<td>8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I’m willing to know.</td>
<td>10.</td>
<td>10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. (skips 2 lines) Another problem is in Iraq.</td>
<td>11. Do You like PoNyS? CauSe I Do. ONeS With Bows. (stick figure picture shooting bow/arrow)</td>
<td>11.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. There’s To many roadside boms.</td>
<td>12. Another IS BaWMMS.</td>
<td>12. another is Iraq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I know the solgers have a good reson but It should stop.</td>
<td>14.</td>
<td>14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. As a true American My sudjustion is that the war should stop.</td>
<td>15.</td>
<td>15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The U.S. already caught Sadame.</td>
<td>16.</td>
<td>16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. But in my mind I think there might be another person out there…but hwo?</td>
<td>17.</td>
<td>17.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I like Pigs! they say quakh!</td>
<td>18.</td>
<td>18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Sincerly,</td>
<td>21. that alls</td>
<td>21. that’s All.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. First/last name age 9</td>
<td>22. First name (picture of pig face saying quahk [sic])</td>
<td>22. First name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. P.S. (In my heart I have a Feeling For the solgers and You.)</td>
<td>23. My original is Better Because Its more understanding and more long</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I did to make it worse (most important*)</td>
<td>What I did to make it better (most important*)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I went oFF topic* with the Poney's Bows and Piggies [sic]. (Y)</td>
<td>Punctuation. [sic] (N)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wrote to Big [sic]. (Y)</td>
<td>Capitalization* [sic] (N)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StoPPy Hand writing [sic]. (Y)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures. One is George Bush with a Beard. (Aka HillBilby) [sic] (Y)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs Said quack [sic] (Y)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MIW used with MIB shows Maggie can control
- Appropriate greeting
- What MIW shows that MIB doesn’t
  - Understands the importance of staying on topic
  - Visuals used were inappropriate
  - Understands importance of supporting details

Without the MIW, I would have learned very little about Maggie’s knowledge of revision. After beginning with a more formal greeting, her MIB actually is a worse draft than her original, a fact that she, herself, acknowledges. However, the MIW showed me that Maggie does have an understanding of revision, and that she can use the above-mentioned strategies to consciously change her writing. She is the type of student who may very well do much of her revision in her head while composing an original draft; in her mind she has already made her writing better.

**Findings**

Based on the analyses of several students’ MIB/MIW compositions, along with their lists of strategies used, I learned the following about my students:

5. Visual appearance—I never realized the importance of a composition’s visual appearance to many of my students. Though I believed that I stressed handwriting need only be legible (whether print or cursive), many students were concerned about their ability to write neat and correct cursive throughout the year;

6. Spelling—The MIW showed that even weak spellers pay attention to spelling;

7. Tone—These three students, like others in my classroom, exhibited their ability to control the voice or tone of their writing;

8. Sentence complexity and word choice/figurative language—Using the MIB/MIW together enabled me to see which students could control their use of sentence and word choices, and which students were experimenting with their sentence and word choice, that is, they were in-transition with these skills.

**Using the MIB/MIW Protocol as a Diagnostic Measure**

A major implication for teaching is that the MIB/MIW Protocol can offer more information about some students that we would otherwise miss as we make assumptions about what students know about good writing. Often these assumptions result in educational practices, which may or may not assist a student in becoming a better writer. If incorrect decisions are arrived at based on incomplete data, the results can even be disastrous. Anthony and another boy scored very similarly on the state writing achievement test (Table 5) in the area of writing process and application; it could therefore be assumed that they needed similar interventions. However, in viewing the MIB/MIW data on these two boys it was discovered that their needs were, in fact, very different. It could have been detrimental to Anthony if he were pulled out of
the classroom to be tutored on writing process and application in the same manner as N. without looking at Anthony’s other work as well as his personal context.

Table 5. Results of State Writing Achievement Tests (Raw data – weight for each section not given)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
<th>Process &amp; App. raw score</th>
<th>Conventions raw score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers can learn more by doing the MIB/MIW Protocol at least once to understand better what is in a student’s zone of proximal development, how a student plans his or her writing (by seeing what was left out of the MIW that was in the original), and what it is he or she is attempting to do with regards to his or her skills. This method could be found to be especially useful with students that are hard to diagnose.

**Importance of the Continuum**

A second major implication for teaching is the importance of the continuum. In addition to giving teachers a way to look deeper at what students know and do with regard to writing, the MIB/MIW Protocol also gives students practice in thinking about their writing in terms of degrees of quality. Whereas this class of fourth grade students were initially puzzled about producing writing that was worse, the idea of thinking about their writing along a continuum, rating it between 1 and 10, with 1 implying *not good* or *don’t like* and 10 standing for *good* or *like*, provided them with a concrete tool for doing an abstract activity. It helped some students get beyond using only lower writing concerns, such as handwriting and spelling, to make their writing better or worse. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) noted:

> Student writers have varieties of relevant knowledge and competence that are not brought into play in composition because they lack executive procedures for bringing these, or for bringing related competencies (such as deliberate language manipulation) into play (p. 293).

Thinking about their writing along a continuum, through use of the MIB/MIW Protocol, is one way to give students a procedure to facilitate the execution of the knowledge and competencies they have. Simply stated, by first writing inadequately, students can be awakened to what they are able to do in order to write well.

### Next steps

While both Andrews-Beck (1989) and DeBenedictis (2006) found using the MIB/MIW strategy to be useful with suburban eighth and fourth grade students respectively, will this protocol glean additional information for other types of students in other grade levels and with other prompts? During the 2007-2008 school year a group of teachers formed a study group for just this purpose, to see what they could learn about their students from using the MIB/MIW Protocol throughout the school year. This group of five teachers was comprised of the following: two middle school teachers (grades 7 and 8), one in an urban school and the other in a suburban school; two high school teachers (grades 10 and 12), one in a suburban setting and one in a rural setting, and a rural elementary inclusion teacher (grades K-1). These five teachers met five times during the school year to compare their findings and to learn from each other. One question was raised early-on by this study group about the MIB/MIW Protocol: Do the students value the strategies they use to make their writing better more than the strategies they use to make their writing worse? Preliminary findings suggest that students from different grade levels and from different settings can benefit from working with the MIB/MIW Protocol. One teacher noticed that her students spent more time revising this year on a standardized test; another teacher found her students “really revising…not just proofreading or adding a few details.” Yet another member of the group who teaches middle school offered, “It’s been a great tool for teachers and my students. It gets kids thinking metacognitively. They used to think to make writing better, write longer, which meant adding details. But they couldn’t explain it. Now they can.” This group plans to stay together for the 2008-2009 school year to further study this Protocol as a clinical assessment and instructional strategy.

### Closing Thoughts

The MIB/MIW Protocol is one way to show what students know about writing revision in a way
What? Write Worse: Assessing Student Writing from Both Ends of the Continuum

that reveals more information than a standardized test, and yet, is not as time consuming as sitting down with each child to observe and interview them individually (Graves, 1975). Using the MIB/MIW Protocol at least once with each student would likely glean more information about that student than data obtained from an annual, high-stakes, standardized test. This is especially true if the students were also required to list those strategies used to make their writing better and worse, something that is not asked of them on standardized tests. Beach (1976) noted, “By asking students to record their thoughts...in writing, before, during, and/or after writing each draft, teachers’...inferences [about students’ changes in self-evaluation] could be supported, modified, or rejected by [this] data” (p. 160). These reflections help us to see revision decisions that are occurring, but that we would otherwise not know were happening. Hilgers (1986) stated, “all writing involves continuous evaluation acts” and found in his study that “all participants used...the results of their evaluations in planning, drafting, and revising their own compositions” (p. 52). Standardized tests are not accounting for ample knowledge our students possess regarding writing. Perhaps our students can learn more about writing good by considering the alternative...and have fun along the way.

References


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Noun Poems: Using Literature to Teach Parts of Speech

Meaning doesn’t arrive fully dressed on a platter. Readers make meaning. But they can’t do it alone. Our students need to be transformed by great literature (Harwayne, 1992).

Introduction

One national standard for the English/Language Arts states: "Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts" (IRA/NCTE, 1996). This is an important standard. Unfortunately, many students, especially those who struggle with reading and writing, are not always highly interested and actively involved in learning and applying language structures, like parts of speech. One recent experience is illustrative. I was visiting a 2nd grade class at a time when the teacher was using a variety of worksheets to teach the nature of and differences between nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. I was sitting in a desk at the back of the room next to a little boy who was completing one worksheet after another. At one point he looked at me, then leaned over and whispered, “This is really boring stuff.” I really didn’t know what to say, so I just whispered back, “Keep at it, and do your best.” He sighed and went slowly back to work. I couldn’t help but think that my comment was lame and that he expected more from me than that!

This little boy became the inspiration for this article. He reminded me that learning should always be exciting, learning parts of speech doesn’t have to be boring, and good literature can help with both.

Background

As a literacy educator, I spend much time working with teachers in the field. It’s one of the real perks of the job. For some time now, I have been collaborating with several K-5 teachers in the Paducah Independent School District (PISD) as part of a professional development initiative designed to improve student literacy achievement across the district. This initiative is grounded in several beliefs about teaching, learning, and the relationship between the two. One belief is that teachers need to have a voice in their own professional development. Therefore, teachers should collaborate with principals to define and determine what goes on in the name of professional development at their school. A second belief is that teachers need to identify personal and school needs for professional development based on analysis of a variety of data. These data include, but are not limited to, national and state standardized test data. A third belief is that teachers need to continually develop their own inquiry questions - those questions that have a sense of real urgency for them - and use these questions as the focus for professional development. Together, these beliefs help make professional development inclusive, meaningful, and relevant.

My role in this initiative is to facilitate conversations with teachers based on their urgent inquiry questions; to provide professional development workshops that address inquiry questions; to conduct demonstration lessons in classrooms; and to support and collaborate with teachers on action research projects. Recently, I met with several teachers and the Title 1 district specialist to discuss possible topics for next year’s professional development. A variety of topics were discussed, but two questions kept recurring.
One question was: How can we get our students to read more? Teachers knew that reading volume is critical to reading progress (Allington, 1994) but were also aware that lack of reading volume was problematic for their students. A second question was: How can we get our students more actively engaged in reading and writing? Teachers felt that the amount of reading was important but not sufficient to reading progress. It was also important to examine the appropriateness of what students were reading and under what contexts they were reading texts. In essence, teachers wanted to increase reading quantity and improve reading quality. Specifically, instructors wanted to expose students to more literature and fewer worksheets, and at the same time they hoped to use this literature to teach reading (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) and writing (grammar, punctuation, parts of speech, story elements, etc.) in exciting and engaging ways. At one point in the discussion, we all learned that some teachers had already started addressing these questions.

One teacher stated that she had been spending time looking for literature to teach the same content area material she normally taught through basals and worksheets. She started using this literature and noticed that her students seemed much more engaged and responded much more positively when trade books, especially poetry, were used. For example, she used the poem “Boshblobberbosh” (Lewis, 1998) to introduce the concept of vowels to her first-grade students.

There once was a man who loved vowels.
So much that he hooted to owls
when they cried, “Ooo-ooo-ooh!”
He cried, “Ooo-ooh!
You half-moonly meloobius fowls!”

Another teacher stated that she teaches typographical signals (apostrophes, commas, colons, semicolons, etc.), but the work has always been dull and frustrating for her, and perhaps even more so for her students. Therefore, she started to look for literature that could help her better teach and help her students learn typographical signals. She uses the poem “The Period” (Armour, in Hopkins, 2004) to introduce typographical signals to her third-grade class because it offers a different way to engage students in an important, but less than engaging subject.

THE PERIOD
Fat little period, round as a ball,
You’d think it would roll,
But it doesn’t
At all.
Where it stops,
There it plops,
There it stubbornly stays,
At the end of a sentence
For days and days.

“Get out of my way!”
Cries the sentence. “Beware!”
But the period seems not to hear or to care.
Like a stone in the road,
It won’t budge, it won’t bend.
If it spoke, it would say to a sentence,
“The end.”

She stated that her students enjoy this poem, especially the way in which it humorously highlights the fundamental struggle between sentences and periods: sentences tend to want to bully periods. That is, sentences want to run on and on without any periods interfering; periods tend to prevent sentences from simply doing just that. The poem also identifies important attributes of a period: shape, function, and attitude. The shape of the period, unlike the comma or apostrophe, is “round as a ball.” Periods “plop” at the end of sentences to make them stop and not run endlessly. Furthermore, the attitude of the period is not to be bullied. It knows its rightful place at the end of a sentence and stubbornly plans to stay there for days and days.

In the end teachers decided that they wanted to explore the power and potential of this kind of work through professional development. To get things started, we decided to develop a curricular engagement that is based on the concept of “borrowing a pattern” (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; Short, Harste, & Burke, 1995) and designed to use literature to teach parts of speech. The following section describes the development of this engagement.

Borrowing a Pattern

Recognizing patterns in text and making connections between texts are important processes in reading and writing. Much professional literature
indicates that patterned texts are effective in helping students develop reading fluency, phonemic awareness, vocabulary growth, and reading comprehension (Routman, 1994; Cunningham and Allington, 2003). Simply stated, patterned texts are those that reflect specific elements or organizational patterns. These include repetitive patterns or refrains; matches between text and illustrations; rhythm of language; familiar sequences, rhymes, and cumulative patterns (Rhodes, 1981). Here is a sample list of patterns and specific books that reflect these patterns:

- **Repetitive Pattern**: Fortunately, Unfortunately (Charlip, 1993);
- **Cumulative Pattern**: The House that Jack Built (Mayo, 2001);
- **Familiar Cultural Sequence**: Q is for Duck (Folsom, 1985);
- **Pictures**: It Looked Like Spilt Milk (Shaw, 1988);
- **Rhyme, Rhythm**: Mother Goose (Wright, 1994);
- **Familiar Problem (Plot)**: The True Story of the Three Little Pigs (Scieszka, 1996);
- **Familiarity in Other Form (Songs)**: The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly (Tabak, 1997);
- **Chronological Sequence**: The Grouchy Lady Bug (Carle, 1996).

Patterned books can also be helpful in specific content area material. For example, in the area of parts of speech Rosie’s Walk (Hutchins, 1971), Elephants Aloft (Appelt, 1993), and Around the House, The Fox Chased the Mouse: A Prepositional Tale (Walton, 2006) are wonderful books for teaching prepositions and prepositional phrases within the context of a story (see reference section for other texts on parts of speech). Moreover, an author text set of patterned books is also a good way to teach parts of speech. The works of Brian Cleary and Ruth Heller are a good example. Each text in the set focuses on a different part of speech and can be used to invite students to borrow the author’s pattern and write their own text on a favorite part of speech. The procedure is

- **Organize students in pairs or small groups (3-4);**
- **Allow students to spend some time reading several of the books together.** While reading, students identify and discuss patterns they see in the text and what they are learning about different parts of speech;
- **Afterwards, encourage students to select one book that has helped them learn a particular part of speech;**
- **Then, direct students to “borrow” the author’s pattern to write their own text about that part of speech.**
- **As a culminating event, invite students to share their writing with the whole class.**

### Noun Poems

Recently, one teacher decided to implement this engagement in her 5th grade class. She started by orally reading excerpts from several books in the Brian Cleary text set to give the class a feeling for the patterns he uses in his work. Here’s an example of three verses from A Mink, a Fink, a Skating Rink: What is a Noun? (Cleary, 1999):

Hill is a noun.
Mill is a noun.
Even Uncle Phil is a noun.
If it’s a train, or brain, or frown,
It’s elementary, it’s a noun.
London, Levis, Pekinese,
Proper nouns name all of these.

Then, she gave students a little time to browse some of the books by themselves or with a partner. Afterwards, she asked students if they had a favorite. Many enjoyed A Mink, a Fink, a Skating Rink: What is a Noun? (Cleary, 1999). She read it aloud to the class, intentionally highlighting the pattern in the text and the information about nouns. Afterwards, she invited students to use the pattern and the information from the book to write their own text about nouns. They immediately went to work. The writing was fast and furious and resulted in what the students eventually called “Noun Poems.”
Noun Poems: Using Literature to Teach Parts of Speech

“What is a Noun” (see Figure 1) illustrates one student’s noun poem. In this poem the student not only defines a noun, but also identifies different types and characteristics of nouns. There are common, proper, plural, singular, and feeling nouns. Moreover, the author cleverly includes some characteristics and examples of each type of noun. Common nouns are “normal,” but instead of being Blah, normal nouns are good so “Please don’t frown…” Proper nouns are cool, like Noble Park Swimming Pool (all upper case) so it’s much more cool to hang out with them than with simple common nouns. And plural nouns end in “s” whereas singular nouns do not.

Similarly, in Figure 2 (unnamed poem) the student doesn’t discuss different kinds of nouns but rather provides examples of common nouns. Interestingly enough, this student also cleverly adds some inference to the poem in the line “you can wear a noun” by hinting that a piece of clothing (shirt, blouse, dress, etc.) can also be a noun. Throughout the poem the student supports the inferences with illustrations.
In the rhyming poem “There’s nouns in town to stay” (see Figure 3), the student demonstrates an understanding that nouns can be viewed as a family. This family consists of common (“Food is a noun. Dude is a noun”), although the term is not explicitly stated, and proper nouns (“Nouns can also be so proper, Like Clark, London, or Kevin Hopper”). To note, Clark refers to the name of a nearby county. Like “What is a Noun” (see Figure 1), this student includes a literal definition of the term noun, but unlike the other poem doesn’t focus specific characteristics, focusing only on two types of nouns in the family - common and proper.

Finally, “A Pan, A Van, A Screaming Fan” (see Figure 4) illustrates nouns as one student’s favorite part of speech. It also shows the process this student borrows based on the pattern in Cleary’s title (“A Mink, a Fink, a Skating Rink”) to create her own. In this poem, the student demonstrates a “love” of nouns, all kinds of nouns. On the one hand, this student is effectively playing with language (“Singler [sic] nouns are Longley like phone, bed, or an ice-cream coney”). On the other hand, this student provides a general understanding of some types of poems but seems to lack some of the specifics. The section on possessive nouns is a good example. The section “Possessive [sic] nouns are stuff that’s yours so yours can be your kitchen tile floors” provides some evidence that the student understands that these kinds of nouns have the characteristic of ownership. However, it doesn’t show evidence that the student can recognize a central characteristic of possessive nouns (a noun that ends in apostrophe s, e.g. girl’s, boy’s, etc.), and how to use them in reading, writing, and speaking. Moreover, the section “So ya [sic] know a pro-noun is a name, like Bob Cobb or the name game” indicates that there is some confusion about the definition and function of a pronoun. For example, Bob Cobb is not a pronoun, it’s a proper noun. Also, pronouns can be understood as a “name game” but, more accurately, they are words that substitute for names, e.g. he for Bob Cobb. It is, however, a start.

Lessons Learned

Afterwards, the teacher and I spent time reflecting on the whole experience. Specifically, we wanted to focus on what lessons were learned and how we could use them to develop future engagements that push our students’ thinking as well as our own. Having said this, we learned three important lessons.

One, this engagement reminded us of the important distinction between educative and miseducative experiences (Dewey, 1938). Miseducative experiences are those that “have the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25); educative
Noun Poems: Using Literature to Teach Parts of Speech

experiences are those that “promote having desirable future experiences” (p. 27). The student at the beginning of this article who complained that learning parts of speech was “just boring stuff” was involved in a miseducative experience. The way in which he was learning parts of speech meant little to him and was doing little to promote future experiences that would be engaging and enjoyable. This experience, however, was not only an educative experience for students, but also for the teacher. She stated:

For years now, I have used lessons from the basal to teach parts of speech, and for years I have been disappointed and frustrated. Teaching the parts of speech isn’t much fun and I suspect that it isn’t much fun for my students to learn, if they learn them at all. And yet, I’ve learned three things from this experience. One, by using this collection of literature, I have covered more and taught more about parts of speech than I ever have with the basal. Two, I think my students have really enjoyed learning about parts of speech through this literature than through the basal – and I think the noun poems are evidence of that. And, three, teaching parts of speech is not really exciting for me. And yet, I actually enjoyed teaching verbs, adjectives, pronouns, and nouns with this literature.

Thus, as we continue to develop curricular engagements, one of our guiding questions will be: To what extent does the curricular engagement create educative, not miseducative, experiences for students?

Second, the aim of this engagement was to address the need to increase reading quantity and enhance reading quality. Although just a start, we were happy with the results. One of the things we liked most was that multiple texts, not a single text, were the basis for this engagement. These texts took the form of an author text set. Another feature we liked was that in the process of developing this text set, we learned that there are more high-quality books for teaching language structures like parts of speech than we had originally anticipated (see reference section) and that using an author text set enabled students to read broadly, write personally, and understand parts of speech from different perspectives. In addition, our research proved that using multiple pieces of literature enabled students to talk and write about what they read and understood (or misunderstood) about this topic. Furthermore, learners developed a positive disposition, and a sense of confidence about reading and writing. In the end, we learned that using multiple texts gives teachers the potential to turn “boring stuff” (like parts of speech) into enjoyable learning, not only for students but also for teachers. It was a win-win situation for everyone. Thus, we plan to develop text sets of literature to use in future curricular engagements.

And three, this experience reminded us about the value of asking inquiry questions that are meaningful and relevant to our professional lives. It also reminded us to trust our questions and use them to enhance our students’ learning as well as our own. We constantly stress the need for students to ask their own questions, and this is a good thing. However, we also need to ask and pursue our own questions. If not, how can we expect to support the inquiry of our students if we don’t support our own?

Finally, like the students, we enjoyed using this curricular engagement in the classroom. We look forward to developing more curriculum that utilizes good literature to support teaching and learning, and we hope to provide inspiration for other teachers, just as one little boy did for me.

Note: I wish to thank Pam Wright and Julie Sheffer for their continued support and constructive feedback on the writing of this article

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**Children’s Literature Cited**


**Other Recommended Children’s Literature**


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I Am A Teacher

By Caroline Loomer
Elyria High School

I Am A Teacher

Jumped

"I'm scared to walk to my mom's car," Jalyce said plainly as I raced past her to get my freshman officers the Homecoming decorations for the hallway. I groaned internally and halted my progress to attend to what I assumed was simply teenage insecurity. "What's wrong, Jalyce?" I tried to sound convincing. "I think there are some girls who are going to jump me." Definitely a needy one, I thought. How could she have possibly made enemies on her first day here? "Alysia said I would get what's coming to me after school."

Another of Jalyce's teachers approached. We silently acknowledged the improbability of the danger, but I agreed to walk Jalyce to her mom's car. "Who's going to mess with my "muscles." A pack of rowdy, angry girls surrounded us not five steps out of the building. The usual profanities and insults pierced the air. I had to wipe the sweat out of my eyes as I urged Jalyce on toward the car. I cautioned Alysia to think about her impending mistake, but the group's cackle only grew louder and more threatening. "She's my teacher, we should do this some other time," Alysia nervously announced. Her companions were unmoved by her plea. "Who cares if she's a teacher, we can handle her too." Those words burned.

As it turned out, nine freshman girls wanted to mess with my "muscles." A pack of rowdy, angry girls in tow, calling out they would get Jalyce tomorrow. Jalyce quickly enclosed herself in the safety of the automobile and we locked eyes. Those big, watery, trusting eyes told me everything I needed to know. She cared if I was a teacher. She cared that I was her teacher.

Caroline Loomer wrote this reflection during the 2008 National Writing Project Summer Institute. She is in her fourth year of teaching after working in athletic administration at Kent State University and for the CYO of Cleveland.
**The Violence Half-Dozen**

So many websites, so little time! Did you ever get overwhelmed by lists of recommended websites? Do you really remember what you stashed in your Favorites? Here is a little list of quality websites to support teachers as they deal with the concept of violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp?area=main">http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp?area=main</a></td>
<td>This really cool site serves two audiences, students and teachers. Maintained by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, this site shares valuable information about bullying and strategies that students can use to respond to bullying. Webisodes that can be downloaded to ipods and Links to ring tones utilizing music from the site play to students' tech side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html">http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/index2.html</a></td>
<td>Information on cyberbullying is available in several formats aimed at several different student age groups as well as adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.esrnational.org/otc/">http://www.esrnational.org/otc/</a></td>
<td>This searchable site, maintained by Educators for Social Responsibility, hosts resource articles (i.e. “Talking with Children about War and Violence in the World”) and lesson plans. Registration is required for access, but is free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.talkingwithkids.org/">http://www.talkingwithkids.org/</a></td>
<td>Talking with Kids about Tough Issues includes resources on violence – as well as topics that could well lead to violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Disclaimer:** Didn’t find your favorite site? Remember, this is a “little” list for you to explore. You can also find this list in a clickable format on the OCTELA website at [http://www.octela.org/newoctela/newresources.html](http://www.octela.org/newoctela/newresources.html).

While you’re there, explore the other resources for English Language Arts teachers maintained by our grade level liaisons. Do you have a suggestion for a great resource? Email Marge Ford at margeford@gmail.com and the editorial team will evaluate it for inclusion on the resource page.
Dealing with Violence Through Literature for Early Readers

Most adults hope to protect children from the realities of violence in the world. However, even young readers can benefit from reading books that show characters that triumph over violent persons and environments. Regina Rees shares titles that explore the violence of gangs, war and the bully.


Imagine being awakened by the sounds of cannon fire and exploding shells that shake the house. In 1863, the citizens of Vicksburg experience this terror for forty-seven days as the Northern troops lay siege to the city. Karen Winnick brings this terrifying time to life in *Lucy’s Cave*, based on the memoirs of Lucy McRae who was a young girl during the siege of Vicksburg. The reader learns how frightened families fled the city and hid in caves and tunnels throughout the countryside. Eleven year old Lucy learns to make the adjustment from living in her comfortable home to hiding in a crowded, damp, cave with several other families. She understands the terrors of war as her family scavenges for food and lives among strangers. This well-researched book is complemented by beautiful illustrations and is a great addition to the historical fiction bookshelf.

*Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (2005) by Mary Williams, Lee & Low

The story of ultimate bravery and perseverance amid the terrors of war is told in this account of Garang, a young Sudanese boy, whose village is destroyed in the civil war that raged in the 1980’s. He returns from tending the cattle to find that his village has been totally destroyed with no survivors. Remembering the message his father had repeated so many times, “Your heart and mind are strong. There is nothing you cannot do,” Garang sets out for safety. Along the way he meets other boys in the same situation. So begins the amazing story of the over thirty thousand “lost boys” who walked over one thousand miles from Sudan to Ethiopia to find safety and freedom. The author, founder of the Lost Boys Foundation, blends facts and fiction to tell this amazing story of these boys, aged five through fifteen, and how they organized themselves into a group determined to survive this harrowing experience. The older boys all “adopted” younger ones to assure their survival. Traveling by night and hiding during the day, the boys took turns hunting for food and standing watch against danger. Constantly plagued by hunger, illness, and death, the boys’ journey finally ends at a refugee camp in Ethiopia where they meet Tom, an American who wants to help them. But the boys’ story does not end here. Fighting comes to Ethiopia, so the boys must flee to Kenya. Once again, Tom comes to their rescue. After some time, he makes arrangements for the boys, now young men, to come to the United States.
This startling story is enhanced by illustrations that blend realism with sharp angles that depict the harshness and terror on the boys’ faces as they try to survive their journey.

**Stars in the Darkness.**
*(2001) by Barbara Joosse, Chronicle*

The world of “gang bangers” is presented through the eyes of a little boy whose older brother Richard joins a gang. Although Richard denies that he is a gang member, Mama knows that he is lying. When Richard comes home late one night with a wound from a knife fight, the little brother and Mama realize that they must do something to take back the neighborhood from the gangs, and make it safe so good boys like Richard don’t have to be a gang banger in order to survive. They rally the other mamas, grandmas, little brothers, and little sisters in the neighborhood to march with flashlights every night, shining light on the bleak streets and alleys while advocating an end to street violence.

Although this seems like a topic for teens, *Stars in the Darkness* speaks to the issue of gangs in such a way that younger readers will learn harsh realities without becoming frightened. In a final note, the author states that this story is based on an actual gang member. She chose to tell the story from the little brother’s perspective to serve as a message to younger children about the dangers of gangs. The book includes websites and resources describing gang prevention.

**The Orange Shoes.**
*(2007) by Trinka Hakes Noble. Sleeping Bear*

Although her family is poor, Delly Porter has a happy life. She has a loving family and a great teacher who encourages her artistic talents. When the teacher announces that the class will host a “shoebox social” to raise funds for the school, the students are excited about decorating the shoe boxes that will be raffled to the highest bidder. Delly is disappointed because she doesn’t even own a pair of shoes let alone a shoe box to decorate. Although her father really needs new tires for the truck, he buys Delly a pair of orange shoes so she can participate in the social in style. Delly is so excited that instead of going barefoot, she wears the shoes to school one day. She is a victim of bullying and her shoes are ruined by some jealous girls. Instead of giving in to this violent act, she uses her artistic talents to decorate the shoes with beautifully painted flowers to cover the scuffs. When her shoe box receives the highest bid, she realizes that she has been justified. This simple story shows younger readers that there are positive ways to deal with unkind acts. If they learn to cope with problems as they arise, they will become strong to deal with larger ones.

**The Secret Seder.**
*(2005) by Dorreen Rappaport, Hyperion*

Based on a true account from the French Resistance during World War II, this story introduces the young reader to Jacques, a French Jew whose family pretends to be Catholic to avoid capture by the Nazis. As Passover approaches, the other Jews in the village plan to hold a secret Seder. When more Nazis are brought in to patrol the town, it becomes apparent that it will be too dangerous for this secret Seder meal to take place. Bound by their faith, the Jews are determined to celebrate their holiday despite the danger. The men of the village decide to meet in a shack in the forest to hold the Seder. Little Jacques begs to go with his father. After an exciting trek through the forest that includes evading Nazi soldiers, Jacques and his father arrive at the location of the Seder. Although the meal lacks many of the traditional foods, the men improvise. Although they have no bitter herbs, one man comments that, “our lives are bitter enough.” Jacques makes all of the men proud as he recites the four questions, which he had secretly practiced. Instead of the traditional answers, the men provide answers that fit their lives. They speak of the fear, sadness, and loss of loved ones murdered by the Nazis. They pray for an end to the violence and for a return to happier times. Throughout this touching scene, some of the men can barely say the prayers through their sobs. As the story of how Moses led the Jews to freedom is recounted, one man moans, “Why doesn’t he free us?” Jacques father replies, “tonight we are free inside ourselves, for by celebrating we defy orders not to practice our religion.” This is not a typical Holocaust story. Rappaport creates
a piece meaningful to younger readers that doesn’t sensationalize the terrors of the Holocaust, but emphasizes the bravery and courage of people who fought for their lives while refusing to abandon their faith.

**The Composition.**

(2003) by Antonio Skarmeta, Groundwood

The Composition introduces young readers to the issue of living in a military dictatorship. Pedro lives in a small village where it is common for military police to brutally arrest suspected opponents of the government at will. Although parents try to hide it from the children, they listen to the radio and look for ways to resist the government. The power of the military is demonstrated when the father of Pedro’s friend is dragged away and arrested for being an enemy of the government. At school the next day, a military officer speaks to Pedro’s class. He announces that the government is sponsoring a composition-writing contest entitled “What My Family Does at Night.” All students are required to participate. The children do not realize that this “contest” is just a ruse by the government to manipulate them to betray their parents. Will the unsuspecting children accidentally divulge information about their parents that will result in their arrest? Pedro struggles with writing the truth about what his parents really do at night and writing fiction to protect them. Skarmeta keeps the reader in suspense until the final page as the military officer returns to the class with the corrected compositions. *The Composition* is a must have for the classroom library. Young readers will understand what it is like to live in fear of the government and how fortunate we are to live in a democracy.

**DEALING WITH VIOLENCE THROUGH LITERATURE FOR EARLY READERS**

Regina Rees is an assistant professor in the department of teacher education at Youngstown State University. She has over twenty years of teaching experience in grades four through twelve. Regina is also a professional storyteller. She is currently the President of OCTELA.
Dealing with Violence Through Literature for Young Adult Readers
Exploring violence in the lives of school-age children can take many forms, whether it concern bullying, date rape, drug use or domestic violence. The TeenXTreme librarians share many challenging titles sure to open the channels of communication about the realities of violence in society.

**Inexcusable**

Chris Lynch’s spare, haunting novel, *Inexcusable*, is a story of date rape told in first person narrative from the rapist’s perspective. Keir Sarafin recounts his senior year in high school with two goals in mind. He wants to convince us that he couldn’t have done what he’s been accused of doing and that he is a “good guy”. He tells us so in the very beginning of his story. He’s a good guy who is loved and cherished by his family, looked up to by his teammates, respectful and good mannered. Ask anybody and they’ll tell you. But, good guys don’t get drunk and wasted on pills with friends and trash a statue at the park. Good guys don’t nearly cripple an opposing football player or participate in a violent hazing of the soccer team. Good guys definitely don’t rape their best friend. That would be inexcusable. When Gigi Boudakian accuses Keir of date rape, Keir tells us that “the way it looks is not the way it is”. More accurately, he should say that the way it looks is not the way he wants to see it. Keir is good at not seeing what he doesn’t want to see. He is a master of self-deception and a perfect example of an unreliable narrator. He sees himself as a loveable rogue with the perfect family when in actuality his father is an alcoholic that lets Keir get away with anything and his sisters stay away at college making excuses to miss Keir’s graduation in order to avoid another drunken episode. Keir is guilty of nothing. This is a chilling, provocative story that speaks to personal responsibility and the often violent world of high school athletics.

**Bullyville**

Bart Rangely is living a typical eighth-grade existence until the morning of September 11th when he wakes up with a fever. Because of this illness he becomes known as the “miracle boy” who saves his mother’s life by keeping her from going to work that day in her office in one of the Twin Towers. Bart’s father who works in the same office is lost. In sympathy, well-wishers across the nation send their support and gifts. One of the gifts Bart receives is a “mercy” scholarship to Baileywell Preparatory Academy, dubbed Bullyville Prep by the local kids in town because of the hazing stories that have spread about the school. Bart has no wish to leave his friends to attend Bullyville, but neither does he want to further trouble...
his grieving mother so he decides to accept the scholarship and attend the school. On the first day, Bart learns that the school has been aptly nicknamed as he is tormented by Tyro Bergen, son of one of the richest benefactors of the academy. Bart keeps the bullying to himself because of his desire to protect his mother until a final cruel prank causes him to seek revenge by keying Tyro’s fancy Cadillac SUV. Both boys are assigned community service work as punishment for their actions. Bart is assigned to a local hospital where he keeps a young girl company and eventually becomes her friend. He suffers another loss when the girl finally succumbs to her illness. Bart’s situation becomes yet even further complicated when he learns the identity of the girl’s family. Written by a National Book Award nominee, Bullyville addresses the topics of violence, revenge, class, illness and grief. Though the prose covers a lot of ground, the pace is quick and very controlled. Bart is a believable character with a credible voice. This book would be an excellent choice for discussions on school violence.

**Leftovers**  

*Leftovers* is a gripping, heart wrenching story of two teenage girls who take turns narrating what appears to be a verbal confession. Although Ardith and Blair come from two very different backgrounds, they share common feelings of loneliness, lack of security and support, and emotional pain. Outcasts at school, they bind together to survive the teenage rumor mill and their families. They are truly leftovers- what’s left over after their families have used them up. Blair’s mother is an attorney on her way up. She tells Blair that sacrifices have to be made if she is to become a judge. Blair soon understands that most of the sacrifices will be Blair’s. Too busy cheating on Blair’s mother with his girlfriend, Blair’s father is an absentee parent as well. Ardith’s parents on the other hand are always around. They are alcoholics that host drunken parties practically every night where Ardith’s father, brother and his friends grope any female within reach while her mother places the blame firmly with the girls who have dressed too “slutty”. Ardith must resort to pad-locking her door at night for security. If the girls had been allowed to stay together, they may have survived their abusive homes despite the complete lack of guidance and protection; however, Blair’s mother is determined to keep them apart. The girls find an advocate in a kindly police officer, but even he is unable to stop the train wreck that has become their respective lives. An accident involving Officer Dave becomes the proverbial last straw. The girls decide to work together to achieve justice at whatever cost, and their revenge is far reaching. Language, sexual explicitness, and drug and alcohol abuse are frequent throughout the book making *Leftovers* a choice for older teen audiences. Wiess, author of the equally gripping *Such a Pretty Girl*, has proven that she is up to the task of tackling difficult issues addressing teens today.

*Boy Kills Man*  

Twelve-year-old Sonny and his best friend Alberto have a relatively normal life growing up in the San Cristobel district of Medellin, Colombia. They dream of soccer and earning extra money by making deliveries for a local cartel-connected grocery store owner. One day, they assist in foiling a robbery at the store, and soon after Alberto begins packing a pistol and routinely disappearing with a shady man, never explaining where he’s going. He also begins making extraordinary money and buying gifts for his family and Sonny, who soon finds out that Alberto has been recruited by drug cartel kingpin *El Fantasma* as an assassin. From this point, Sonny’s life turns inexorably darker as his troubled relationship with his Uncle Jairo becomes increasingly violent. He grows jealous of the status and power his friend possesses and, ultimately, Alberto disappears for good. The reader then witnesses the gradual extinguishing of Sonny’s future as he voluntarily journeys into Medellin’s dark underworld and the novel reaches a disturbing, heartbreaking climax.

Whyman’s debut novel is not for the faint of heart, but his unflinching portrayal of Sonny’s inevitable death spiral is compelling and convincingly rendered. While the references to smoking grass and drinking and images of truly shocking violence suggest an older audience, the presentation (such as the intriguing cover featuring a boy with angel wing
tattoos and a gun in his belt) makes Sonny’s world accessible to younger readers as well. It should be understood, though, that Whyman’s approach is far from sensationalistic: indeed, the novel’s authenticity and basis in fact illuminate the often-invisible personal and social costs of the largely US-driven international drug trade, and introduce readers to a world that they may never have known about otherwise. As such, it could be a valuable tool for launching discussions on a variety of topics, including gangs, violence, the war on drugs and, perhaps most importantly, the reasons why the money, machismo and power garnered violence is so attractive-and fulfilling-to youth who live desperate lives of poverty, lack of security and absence of affection, not only in Medellín but the world over…including America.

**Endgame**


Fifteen-year-old Gray Wilton’s family relocated to Connecticut from Massachusetts after Gray was twice suspended from school for carrying a knife. Gray tries to make a fresh start at Greenford High, hoping that the bullying he suffered in middle school will be a thing of the past. He finds, however, that bullies are everywhere— including his new school—and they don’t take long to find him. The story that follows is painful to read. In addition to the harassment that Gray and his friend Ross suffer at the hands of the Jock Pack (led by cruel and arrogant Zorro), Gray’s home life is a shambles. His gun-loving father clearly places the blame for the family’s relocation on Gray and constantly tries to “make a man” out of him, ignoring Gray’s passion (and talent) for music and drumming. His mother is a passive spectator, and while older brother Peter is quietly supportive, Gray resents being constantly compared to him and found wanting. The only real comfort he finds is with the family dog, his closest companion. Meanwhile, neither school staff nor parents do anything about the harassment. Events reach a fever pitch when the Zorro and crew destroy Gray’s drumset, run over his beloved dog and later try to force Ross and Gray to engage in oral sex in the gym showers. It all culminates in Gray taking his father’s gun to school and using it.

Garden tells her story using the mechanism of interviews conducted by Gray’s lawyer in a juvenile detention center and associated flashbacks, and this proves to be an effective approach. One can’t help but empathize with Gray and feel outrage at the injustices piled upon him. However, by the end of the book this reader felt that Garden had maybe overdone it a bit, veering dangerously close to melodrama. While the characterizations are, for the most part, believable, the villains of the story end up looking a bit cartoonish, especially Gray’s father, who at one point even begins to say that Gray should have been hit by the car instead of the dog. At times, I felt it unlikely that none of the adults would have intervened; nonetheless, I’ll admit I was drawn into the story. **Endgame** possesses an emotional depth that sets it apart from similarly-themed works like Myers’ **Shooter** and Strasser’s **Give a Boy a Gun**, and would be an excellent source of discussion about the impact of bullying, school violence and the need for adults and teachers to take action against this sort of behavior.

**The Last Domino**


Travis Ellroy is a junior in high school and a frequent target for bullies, particularly star athlete P.J., whose car Travis has damaged when randomly throwing stones from a hilltop. Travis is also haunted by the memory of his brother Ritchie, a “golden boy” who shot himself several years earlier. Soon after Travis is befriended by new student Daniel Pulver the dominoes of the title start to fall, marked by the appearance of a voice in Travis’ head that says things that he himself feels but doesn’t have the courage to say. Manipulative Daniel taps into Travis’ depression and anger, emotions rooted in the Ellroys’ dysfunctional family life and the constant taunts of classmates. Daniel carefully and deviously spurs Travis on to increasingly abhorrent behavior, showing him how to shoot a gun, giving him misogynist dating advice and committing acts for which Travis gets blamed. After Travis’ firing from his job and the utter failure of his date with the girl he has a desperate crush on, Daniel conceives an attack on P.J’s newly repaired car and only Travis is suspected of the deed. The brutal climax comes when Travis
finds out about Daniel’s deception, steals Mr. Pulver’s Baretta and goes on a murderous rampage that begins at home and ends in the school cafeteria.

Meyers’ harrowing first novel explores the factors that lead to Travis’ spree, with each chapter propelling the story forward in countdown style. Meyer also borrows a technique from Walter Dean Myers’ Shooter where police interviews and journal entries are interspersed with chapters in an attempt to add depth and complexity. The writing itself is almost expository—the language is harsh and realistic as Travis narrates his own descent into desperation. While the general sequence of events is all too familiar in regards to school shootings, the novel contains an unusual element in the mysterious character of Daniel, something of a manipulative mastermind who pulls Travis’ strings and gets him to do exactly what he wants him to, leading the reader to ask the question: who is the real villain here? Whatever the answer, the devastating denouement of the story offers no tidy conclusion or salvation. While The Last Domino lacks the deep characterization of Shooter, Meyer successfully shows that some crimes that appear senseless on the surface have reasons— and they can happen anywhere.

These first person narratives not only deal with some type of violence—street, domestic random—, but also feature characters who in one way or another are trying to determine who they are or can be.

Dark Dude

Fifteen-year-old Rico Fuentes, “dark dude” of the title, has had enough of home, school and street life in 1960’s Spanish Harlem. His mother blames his early childhood illness for leaving the family in debt, his father drinks, and his fair skin makes him an easy target for Latino and Black toughs at school and in the neighborhood. Wanting no part of the street scene, Rico’s hero is Huckleberry Finn and his dream is to write comics with his best friend, Jimmy, who will illustrate them. Jimmy’s artistic talent is denigrated by his father, and seeing no future for himself with his art, Jimmy becomes a junkie. Following an attack and Jimmy’s burns while using heroin, Rico’s parents threaten to send him to military school. Rico freaks and determines to save both Jimmy and himself (Huck Finn and Jim) by running away. They head for rural Wisconsin and Gilberto, an older-brother figure to Rico. Rico and Jimmy get jobs to pay for their rent, and over the next year, Rico does much soul-searching and growing up. Because Gilberto feels Rico should at least let his parents know he’s safe, Rico calls home but ends the call abruptly. He continues to feel guilty about leaving his parents with the turning point coming when he is attacked one night at work by two carloads of racists. He realizes that he has come to grips with who he is and that where he is doesn’t change that. In the end he calls home to say he’s returning. By turns humorous, gritty and sad, Pulitzer prize-winning author Hijuelos, has written an authentic coming of age story for male urban youth. While not graphically violent, the book communicates both the implied and actual dangers from which Rico is running.

Chasing Tail Lights
(2007) by Patrick Jones. Walker & Company

Christy wants out—out of high school (this is her senior year), out of the house (where she cooks, cleans, rears her niece Bree, tries to evade rape by her older, drug-dealing half-brother), and out of Flint (a prime example of urban decay). She finds an unlikely ally in a rich doctor’s daughter, Annie. Together they get high and hang out on a highway overpass to “chase tail lights,” hoping the lights will lead them away to someplace “safe.” Similar to Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson, but not as well written, Christy’s story is by turns horrific and aggravating. Her half-brother Ryan has been raping her since she was in 6th grade, her mother appears to be oblivious to it, and Christy won’t tell anyone. The reader can feel her fear and pain and hates her mother’s refusal to see the obvious. Only after Christy attempts suicide and sees evidence that Ryan has begun to rape their niece does she begin her healing process. She eventually opens up to a counselor about what Ryan has done, breaking the control he has had over her. Revenge is sweet as she requests that he be sentenced to the same prison as her older
brother, Robert. He has told her what he would do if anyone ever molested his daughter, Bree. At times the story is hard to follow as chapters during Christy’s senior year alternate with chapters of earlier years, but not in chronological order. Nevertheless, it’s a hard-hitting read.

Street Pharm
(2006) by Allison van Diepen. Simon Pulse

Tyrone Johnson is quite the businessman, that is to say, drug-dealer. At sixteen, he’s street smart, careful, and follows his own personal code based on his reading of The Art of War. It’s what’s kept him on top of his father’s drug business while his dad’s in prison. Circumstances lead him to enroll in an alternative school where he meets Alyse. She’s an unwed mother hoping to finish high school and improve her life and that of her son. Ty begins to see (ever so slowly) that there could be a different kind of life for him off the streets. The danger and violence of Ty’s kind of life is never graphically detailed, but we learn about one of his young drug runners who is caught and jailed, another good friend/drug runner nearly lost to addiction, and his partner, much like a brother, ambushed and killed in a drug deal. Profanity is used, but not gratuitously, and the ending is a little too good to be true. But short quick chapters, some only a page long, grab the reader and make it a very fast read, especially for reluctant readers.

TeenXtreme is the appellation ascribed to the jovial triumvirate that coordinates systemwide young adult services for the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County. Beverly Chearno is an adult specialist and founding member/overall coordinator of TeenXtreme and has been with the library for 35 years. During that time, she has been a children’s librarian, a branch supervisor and a regional coordinator in addition to her current position. Cindy Beach is also a founding member of TXT. An adult librarian who specializes in young adult services, she has been instrumental in developing teen services at YPL. John Waller, the newest TXT member, also divides his time between adult and young adult services but likes to think of himself as a young adult... uh, librarian.
Save the Date!

OCTELA Spring Conference
The New Literacies: Challenges and Solutions for the 21st Century
March 26-27, 2010
Columbus, Ohio

Keynote Speakers to Date
Dr. Steven Layne and Cinda Williams Chima

Dr. Steven L. Layne serves as full time Associate Professor of Education and Literature at Judson College in Elgin, IL. His vast array of experience working at multiple grade levels in the public schools allows him a unique camaraderie with teachers and librarians and his award-winning books for children and young adults add another appealing element to his dynamic presentations. His picture books include P is for Princess, Number 1 Teacher: A School Counting Book, Love the Baby and Thomas’s Sheep and the Spectacular Science Project. Young Adult titles include This Side of Paradise and Mergers.

Best-selling author Cinda Williams Chima began writing romance novels in middle school, which were often confiscated by her English teacher. Her first published novel is The Warrior Heir, a modern young adult fantasy set in Ohio (Hyperion, 2006). A sequel, The Wizard Heir, was released in May, 2007, and her third novel, The Dragon Heir, was published in August, 2008. Chima is a graduate of Case Western Reserve University and the University of Akron. She is a member of the Lit Center of Cleveland, the Society for Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. Chima lives in Ohio with her family, and is always working on her next novel. In this case, it’s The Demon King the first in a new fantasy trilogy for Disney-Hyperion, due to be released in Fall, 2009.

For more information, visit http://www.octela.org
OCTELA Spring Conference 2010: March 26-27, 2010
Doubletree Hotel Worthington, 175 Hutchinson, Worthington, Ohio 43235

CALL FOR PROPOSALS:
The New Literacies: Challenges and Solutions for the 21st Century
Featured Speakers: Steven Layne and Cinda Chima, others TBA

Session Title (please keep it short): Description of content and purpose in 50 words or fewer: 
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________

NOTES:
1) If your proposal is accepted, both the title and the content may be edited to fit printing requirements.
2) When you submit your proposal, please include the Ohio content standards that your session addresses.
3) Please indicate if you are affiliated with an Ohio writing project. (yes) ________ (no) _________

Audience: Circle the grade level(s) for which this session would be most beneficial.
K-4 5-8 9-12 HS & College Multiple Levels

Audio Visual Needs* (Please circle): Overhead TV/VCR Internet (requires a wireless card)

*Make sure that the AV you request beyond an overhead is essential to the successful presentation of your content. Due to the cost of A/V rental, OCTELA will NOT be able to provide computer/LCD projectors. If you need this for your presentation, you will be asked to bring your own equipment.

Contact Presenter's Name: ________________________________________________________________
Address: ______________________________________________________________________________
City, State, Zip: _________________________________________________________________________

Work phone: (______)______________________ Home phone: (_______)__________________________

Other Presenter(s): ______________________________________________________________________

Name of School Building and District & Complete Address for Building: _______________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

If your proposal has one or two presenters, each presenter will receive a reduction of one fourth of the full registration rate. For example, if the registration (TBA) is set at $160, presenters will pay $120. Additional presenters will be asked to pay the full conference fee.

PROPOSALS DUE NO LATER THAN JANUARY 15, 2010
E-Mail to: Karen Tollafield  at ktoll82@yahoo.com
or Mail: 6908 Sutherland Ct. Mentor, Ohio  44060
Note: Proposals will be acknowledged by email. Please supply your email address.