

Remember the wisdom

By Lisa Thibodeaux, Electronic Communications Manager

In 1987, Bettye Mischen – former TCTELA President and Texas State Teacher of the Year – offered gentle words of advice to young English teachers in an article published in The Many Faces of Teaching (Buston, Prichard, et.al., University Press of America). Bettye passed away in 2004, but she lives on in the hearts of the hundreds of teachers and students who remember her as a wise and loving friend, colleague, and teacher. And now Bettye continues to lead the way for a new generation of teachers using these same sage words from 1987 that still ring true today.

Excerpts from “Some Thoughts on Methods”
by Bettye Mischen, 1936-2004

The traditional role of the teacher is changing. Once the teacher was a transmitter of information. Now he is a director of learning. The successful teacher endeavors to make each student an active participant in class procedures. He puts the student in the spotlights as often as possible and assumes a behind-the-scenes role for himself.

Most experienced teachers agree that use of these methods tends to improve student performance. Among these are small group work, individual projects, and pupil demonstration. Other methods, all of which tend to de-emphasize the student's classroom role, are falling from favor. These are the lecture, question-and-answer sessions, and unstructured use of movies.

One of the least effective methods is the question-and-answer session. We all understand why. What we optimistically call “class discussion” in reality is a dialogue between the teacher and the two

or three most verbal pupils in the class. [Instead,] choose a more effective method, small group work. Small groups can discuss all kinds of things. When differences of opinion break out, the teacher is happy, for he knows that his students are thinking.

Pupil report and demonstration are simply another way of saying pupil involvement. No student likes to sit passively in the classroom, day after day, watching a teacher perform. He wants to get in on the act. And well he should, since by participation he accomplishes more.

Use a modified readers' theater. In the presentation of poems, both students and teachers participate in reading such selections as “The Great Lover,” “Eleanor Rigby,” “Within You, Without You,” “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night,” and “The Hollow Men.”

A growing trend in education is the offering of options to students. On the simplest level, a teacher may give alternate assignments for a single lesson. In a short fiction unit, he may allow students to choose stories they wish to read. Certainly they do not all have the same interests or abilities. They need not all read the same stories.

New teachers and veterans alike should remember that our students' welfare must be our primary concern. The test of any method should be an affirmative answer to these questions: Will it have pupil appeal? Will it involve pupil participation? Will it help pupil performance? May we constantly raise these questions as we evaluate ourselves and our programs in the hope that our students will have benefited from passing our way.

lisa.thibodeaux@pisd.edu

Gringotts Vault (Financial Update)

By Alana Morris, Executive Secretary



*Inscribed on the silver doors
at Gringotts Bank:
Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn.
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.
-JK ROWLING*

The 2013-2014 budget is a balanced budget based on at least 650 attendees registering for the 2014 conference slated for Corpus Christi January 31-February 2. The conference registration fee will be \$210 for ALL national keynote speakers and all concurrent sessions. Luncheons will require a separate ticket at \$25 each.

As Corpus Christi is a new location, we would like everyone's help in publicizing. Please encourage your colleagues, especially new teachers, to attend this powerful literacy event. There is still time to get your registrations in before the winter break.

We invite each of you to be part of our

member financial audit, which takes place each year during the conference. Through this process, the TCTELA financial statements and supporting documents are transparent for our members.

We look forward to seeing everyone in Corpus Christi! Please register soon as available campus funds are typically exhausted early in the school year.

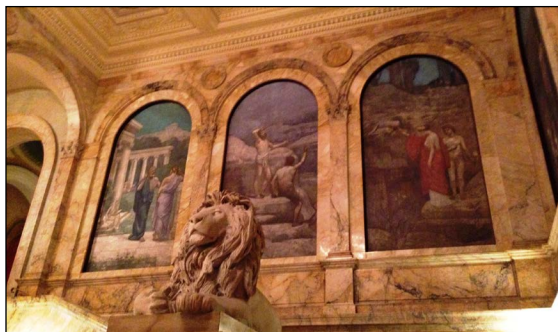
Alana.Morris@springbranchisd.com

President's message

By Kay Shurtleff, President

"The past is all around us."
-Paul Fleischmann, NCTE,
Boston

As it always is, NCTE was an inspiring, unforgettable experience. Given the "Lead the Way" theme for our upcoming state conference and the rich history of Boston, this year seemed particularly meaningful.



So often the best part of a trip is the unplanned, serendipitous event. I had built in time for afternoon tea at the Boston Public Library, and Katrina Gonzales, current Past President, kindly indulged me and came along. We were not, however, prepared to be absolutely smitten by the building itself and very nearly unable to leave the premises!

We found ourselves on a guided tour of the library, learning about its history, its art, and its architecture. In so many ways, the library has led the way for other libraries, as well as for learning, in the United States. Built in 1852, it was the first library to lend books free of charge to citizens. It was also the first library to designate an area for children, the first to initiate storytelling, the first to issue an Annual Report of Trustees, and the first to establish a branch system.

Bostonian Joshua Bates became our country's first major benefactor to our country's first city-supported library when he donated \$50,000 for its first collection. His stipulations were these: "The only condition I ask is, that the building should be an ornament to the City, that there shall be room for one hundred to one hundred and fifty persons to sit at reading-tables, that it shall be perfectly free to all, with no other restrictions than be necessary for the preservation of the books." (Bates' entire letter can be viewed here: [www.bpl.org/central/bates/bates letter.htm](http://www.bpl.org/central/bates/bates%20letter.htm))

In so many areas, Boston's community of readers led the way.

What has this to do with us? We stand on the shoulders of our own community of readers, writers, and teachers. In this issue of *Texas Voices*, you'll get a chance to see how some of our members have led the way for others. As you read, I hope you'll reflect on those individuals who have led the professional way for you and let us share your comments at our conference. I invite you to send those personal reflections to info@tctela.org. As we look toward our 50th anniversary next year, we plan to celebrate those leaders.

Perhaps more importantly, I want to invite you to realize your own potential as a leader. No matter where you are in your career, there are those who need your shoulders on which they might stand. You may not realize it, but our profession needs your leadership.

What can you do? Keep in touch with others in our professional organization. Encourage someone else to join. Join a committee. Run for an office on the board. Present at a conference. Submit an article for *English in Texas* or *Texas Voices*. Lead the way. kay.Shurtleff@region10.org

TCTELA Board of Directors

President

Kay Shurtleff, Region 10 ESC
972-348-1756 kay.shurtleff@gmail.com

President-Elect

Tim Martindell, Fort Bend ISD
281-435-4354 ptmwriter@aol.com

Past President

Katrina Gonzales, Schleicher County ISD
325-853-2514 katrina.gonzales@scisd.net

Executive Secretary

Alana Morris, Spring Branch ISD
713-251-2496 alana.morris@springbranchisd.com

Recording Secretary

Brian Bass, Lake Travis ISD
512-533-6100 bassb@ltsd.schools.org

VP for Membership and Affiliates

Molly Adams, Waxahachie ISD
817-964-7912 fridayswithfrogs@gmail.com

VP-Elect for Membership and Affiliates

Kim Pinkerton, University of Houston-Downtown
713-221-2778 pinkertonk@uhd.edu

Electronic Communications Manager

Lisa Thibodeaux, Plano ISD
469-951-2192 lisa.thibodeaux@pisd.edu

SLATE/NCTE Representative

Margaret Hale, University of Houston
713-614-8218 grithale@aol.com

Editor, Texas Voices

Jennifer Engle, San Angelo ISD
214-906-2059 jennifer.Engle@saisd.org

Editors, English in Texas

Gwynne Ash, Texas State University
512-245-8068 gwynne@txstate.edu

Jane Saunders, Texas State University
512-245-1604 janesaunders@txstate.edu

Lori Assaf, Texas State University
512-245-9163 lassaf@txstate.edu

Carol Delaney, Texas State University
512-245-2044 cdelaney@txstate.edu

Valerie Taylor, Eanes ISD
512-288-3247 vfstaylor@sbcglobal.net

Executive Director

Amy Blakely
512-617-3200 fax: 888-595-7276
amyblakely@ventureall.com

TCTELA

919 Congress Avenue #1400
Austin, Texas 78701
Phone: 512-617-3200
Fax: 888-595-7276

Texas Voices, published four times per year, is a member of the National Council of Teachers of English Affiliate Information Exchange Agreement.

From the blogosphere...

Want to be a Nerdy Blogger? <http://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/>

...to the website

Add your own personal reflections of professionals who have led the professional way for you. <http://www.tctela.org/>

Honoring Outstanding High School Writers:

The 2014 NCTE Achievement Awards in Writing Contest for High School Juniors

Want to Help Your Best Writers Shine?

Since 1957, NCTE has sponsored the *Achievement Awards in Writing* contest to recognizing some of the best student writers in the nation. In 2013, 753 students were nominated for this award, and 155 students were recognized by NCTE as outstanding writers.

For 2014, NCTE's goals for the *Achievement Awards in Writing* contest are to honor more student writers and, therefore, to promote the importance of writing. If you would like to get involved, here are some tips to get you started:

Take the Lead: Select one English teacher volunteer to serve as coordinator of the school nomination and submission process.

Find the Best Writers: Ask English teachers in your department to submit the names of their best 11th grade writers. Look beyond the teachers of current 11th graders; students' former ninth- and tenth-grade teachers are also good sources for nominees.

Determine the Number: The number of nominees allowed from each school is tied to current total enrollment in grades 10, 11, and 12.

Narrow the Field: The English department should determine which students will become your official representatives. The *Achievement Awards in Writing* contest rewards excellence in all modes of writing, so look for students who write with a lively voice, with passion, and with a talent with words, not just students with the top grades in English.

Coach the Students: Student nominees may submit up to 10 typed pages for their submissions, 6 pages of their best writing in any genre and up to 4 pages responding to a prompt listed on the contest website: <http://www.ncte.org/awards/student/aa>. Encourage your nominees to work through several drafts and revisions.

Submit your Entries: The submission deadline is February 13, 2014. Entries are submitted online by one teacher per school at <http://www.ncte.org/awards/student/aa>.

Get the results: Submissions are judged by a nationwide committee of English/ Language Arts educators. NCTE announces the results online in May.

Honor your nominees: Students winners will have their names posted on the NCTE website and will receive certificates honoring their achievement. Many schools honor their student nominees at awards ceremonies. Finally, remind the nominees to include this honor in their college applications!

Ready to get started? The *Achievement Awards in Writing* contest is a wonderful way to promote writing at your school while helping your best writers to shine. Coordinating the submission process is professionally rewarding for many teachers. According to Martha Beall, an English teacher at West Springfield HS in Virginia, "It is exciting for me to mentor talented students who are keenly invested in their writing. Their memorably polished poetry and prose awaken both my mind and heart."

To get started, visit the contest website at <http://www.ncte.org/awards/student/aa>.

2014 Conference at a Glance

SATURDAY KEYNOTE



Austin Kleon

How To Steal Like An Artist

Nothing is completely original, and all creative work builds on what came before. In this keynote, Austin Kleon will teach you how to embrace influence, establish a creative lineage, and think of yourself as a mashup of what you let into your life.

Austin Kleon is the author of two best-selling books: *Steal Like An Artist* (Workman, 2012) is an illustrated manifesto for creativity in the digital age, and *Newspaper Blackout* (Harper Perennial, 2010) is a collection of poetry made by redacting words from newspaper articles with a permanent marker. He's currently at work on his third book, *Show Your Work!*

His work has been featured on NPR's *Morning Edition*, *PBS Newshour*, and in *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. *New York Magazine* called his work "brilliant," *The Atlantic* called him "positively one of the most interesting people on the Internet," and *The New Yorker* said his poems "resurrect the newspaper when everybody else is declaring it dead."

He speaks about creativity in the digital age for organizations such as Pixar, Google, SXSW, TEDx, and *The Economist*.

He grew up in the cornfields of Ohio, but now he lives in Austin, Texas, with his wife, Meghan, his son, Owen, and his dog, Milo.

SATURDAY LUNCHEON & POETRY SESSION



Ansen and Jan Seale

Artistic creativity can be taught, but a deep understanding of the arts can come only from a holistic approach stemming from a number of identifiable sources. The Seale family's creativity has evolved through the years as a natural way of "being" and interacting with each other, with the father, a composer and orchestra conductor; the mother, a writer; and the three sons respectively art photographer, commercial artist, and writer.



Ansen and Jan's presentation will be based on the premise that creativity evolves from both nature and nurture, often finding its origins in the home, and with help from sensitive,

dedicated teachers, may result in a lifelong dedication to and appreciation of the arts. They will discuss the factors that produce creative children, giving numerous illustrations of their family's joys in creating art both separately and together.

Ansen, a photographer and inventor, is the eldest son of Carl and Jan Seale. He lives and works in San Antonio where he develops public art projects and does commercial photography. His work has been shown in galleries and museums throughout Texas. His international exhibitions include China, Amsterdam, and the Canary Islands. Jan is a writer with national credits in poetry, fiction, and essays. She is the author of eight books of poetry, two collections of short stories, and three books of nonfiction, as well as several children's books. She recently traveled 26,000 miles over Texas, addressing 117 audiences in her active year as the 2012-13 Texas Poet Laureate.

SUNDAY WORKSHOPS



Teri Lesesne

Leading to Reading

How do we move students from school-time to lifelong readers? Research-based best practices offer a clear path.

Teri Lesesne (rhymes with insane) is a past president of TCTELA and also served as the organization's journal editor and secretary. A longtime member of YALSA (the Young Adult Library Services Division of ALA), Teri has served on various committees including the Printz (*Going Bovine* was

the winning title), the YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award (*Janis Joplin: Rise Up Singing* was the award recipient), the Morris (*Where Things Come Back*), and the Odyssey Audiobook Committee (*The Fault in Our Stars*). She teaches literature for children and teens at Sam Houston State University in the Department of Library Science. Teri is the winner of the 2007 ALAN Award for distinguished contribution to the field of adolescent literature and the 2011 Halle Award from NCTE for Excellence in Middle Level Education. Teri is the author of three professional books and numerous articles about reading and motivation and teens. You can see her blog at <http://professornana.livejournal.com> and follow her on Twitter (@professorNana).



Joyce Armstrong Carroll

Using Prompts to Assist Writing: Be the Insider

Together we will examine how to use prompts as the impetus for writing a good, solid, authentic composition. The "write what you know" trope plays out here in helping teachers help students get a handle on any writing prompt.

On May 14, 2004, Georgian Court University in Lakewood, New Jersey, awarded Joyce Armstrong Carroll the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters honoris causa for "her mark on the world of education and in so doing influenced the future for good," for "her love for teaching and for enlightening young minds," as "a trailblazer in her field," for "her accomplishment as a schoolteacher and college professor," which "has changed lives and advanced her field," for her "prolific and award-winning publications," which "have added significantly to the body of knowledge in education," and for "her enthusiasm for life, her dedication to her students, and her pursuit and attainment of excellence."

In her 54-year career, Joyce Armstrong Carroll, Ed.D., H.L.D., has taught every grade level from primary to graduate school. In the past 36 years, she has trained teachers in the teaching of writing as Co-director of the New Jersey Writing Project, then The New Jersey Writing Project in Texas, now Abydos Learning International. A nationally known consultant, she has authored a national textbook program, numerous books and articles for teachers, and poems. With her husband Edward E. Wilson, Dr. Carroll authored *Acts of Teaching: How to Teach Writing*, now in its 2nd edition, as well as the award-winning *Poetry After Lunch: Poems to Read Aloud*. Her latest book is *4 X 4: Practical Methods for Writing Persuasively*. A book entitled *The Critical Writer* is forthcoming. She has recently been awarded the Edmund J. Farrell Lifetime Achievement Award from TCTELA.

Dr. Carroll's mantra is, "If you teach it, they will learn."

NOTABLE CONCURRENT SESSIONS

Mastering the STAAR Poetry Standards—Fearlessly

Beyond Bedtime: Using the Read Aloud to Ignite Instruction for All Ages—Yes All!

Trimming the Fat: Slimming Down those Wordy Essays

BEOFWOLF to Texting: Growing Writers in the Digital Age

Relevance, Relationships, and Reading Living: Fostering Reading Engagement in All Readers

The Human Experience: Learning About Humanity Through the Lens of Modern and Classical Literature

Teaching Genre and Finding a Common Theme Across Genres

Citizens of the World: Teaching Content, Ethics, and Morality in the Classroom

Sci Fi for Non-Sci Fi Fans

Focus Pocus: How Instructional Phrases Work Magic

2014 Conference at a Glance

2014 SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Friday, January 31, 2014

8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Attendee Registration
8:00 am – 5:30 pm	Exhibits Open
9:00 am – 11:15 am	Victoria Young, Karin Miller, and PechaKucha
11:30 am – 12:45 pm	Luncheon with Walter Dean Myers
1:15 pm – 2:30 pm	General Session Welcome and Keynote with Luis Valdez
3:00 pm – 5:15 pm	Concurrent Sessions A and B

Saturday, February 1, 2014

8:00 am – 4:30 pm	Attendee Registration
8:00 am – 5:30 pm	Exhibits Open
8:30 am – 10:00 am	General Session and Keynote with Austin Kleon
10:30 am – 11:30 am	Concurrent Session C
11:45 am – 1:00 pm	Luncheon with Ansen and Jan Seale
1:30 pm – 5:15 pm	Concurrent Sessions D, E, and F
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm	Poetry Reading

Sunday, February 2, 2014

8:30 am – 10:00 am	Attendee Registration
9:00 am – 12:00 pm	Workshops with Joyce Armstrong Carroll and Teri Lesesne

FRIDAY KEYNOTE



Luis Valdez

Luis Valdez is regarded as one of the most important and influential American playwrights living today. His internationally renowned and Obie award-winning theater company El Teatro Campesino (The Farm Workers' Theater)

was founded by Luis in 1965—in the heat of the United Farm Workers (UFW) struggle and the Great Delano Grape Strike in California's Central Valley. His involvement with Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the early Chicano Movement left an indelible mark that remained embodied in all his work.

Luis's numerous feature film and television credits include the box office hit film *La Bamba*, *Cisco Kid*, and *Corridos: Tales of Passion and Revolution*. His countless awards include numerous LA Drama Critic Awards, Dramalogue Awards, Bay Area Critics Awards, the prestigious George Peabody Award for excellence in television, the Presidential Medal of the Arts, the Governor's Award for the California Arts Council, and Mexico's prestigious Aguila Azteca Award, given to individuals whose work promotes cultural excellence and exchange between the US and Mexico.

His latest anthology *Mummified Deer and Other Plays* was recently published by Arte Publico Press. As an educator, he has taught at the University of California, Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, Fresno State University, and was one of the founding professors of CSU Monterey Bay. Luis was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Theatre at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. In 2007 he was awarded the prestigious Rockefeller fellowship.

FRIDAY LUNCHEON



Walter Dean Myers

Walter Dean Myers was raised by foster parents in New York's vibrant Harlem community. He fell in love with books at an early age and began writing poems and stories by the time he was nine. Due to family difficulties, he left school and joined the army on his 17th birthday.

After serving three years in the army, Walter worked various jobs while in the evenings, wrote adventure and mystery stories for men's magazines. In 1969 he won the Council on Interracial Books for Children contest, which led to the publication of his first book for children, *Where Does the Day Go?*

Walter took on the challenge of trying to make a living as a full time writer in 1977. Since then he has published over 90 books for children and young adults as well as short fiction and articles for national magazines. He considers himself extremely lucky to make a living doing what he loves.

He has received many awards for his work in this field including the Coretta Scott King Award, five times. Two of his books, *Scorpions* and *Somewhere in the Darkness* were awarded Newbery Honors. For his book *Monster*, he received the first Michael Printz Award for Young Adult literature awarded by the American Library Association. *Monster* and *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* were also National Book Award Finalists.

His latest books are *Darius & Twig* and *All the Right Stuff* published by HarperCollins, and *Invasion and The Cruisers* published by Scholastic.

Walter lives in New Jersey with his wife, Constance, and cat, Sheba.

FRIDAY NOTABLE SESSIONS



Victoria Young

STAAR English I and II: Creating Meaningful Connections between Assessment and Instruction

This session will focus on the most up-to-date information about the redesigned STAAR English I and II assessments. The presenter will use the 2013 released tests, scoring guides, and sample student responses to discuss the level of performance required for success on STAAR. The presenter will share what our students' 2013 English I and II performance revealed about the quality and coherence of our instruction. Attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions.

STAAR Writing at Grades 4 and 7: Creating Meaningful Connections between Assessment and Instruction

This session will focus on the most up-to-date information about the STAAR writing assessments at grades 4 and 7. The presenter will use the 2013 released tests, scoring guides, and sample student responses to discuss the level of performance required for success on STAAR. The presenter will share what our students' 2013 writing performance revealed about the quality and coherence of our elementary and middle school instructional programs. Attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions.



Karin Miller

ELA/Reading Curriculum Update – K – 8

This session will provide the latest news related to ELA/Reading education in Texas. Attendees will receive up-to-date information about new professional development opportunities for middle school teachers to help them improve student writing. Resources for students, Texas SUCCESS, and new OnTRACK lessons for grades 7 and 8, will also be shared.

ELA/Reading Curriculum Update – High School

Attendees will be provided with the latest developments related to ELA/Reading education in Texas. This TEA session will include information about State Board of Education decisions regarding implementation of House Bill 5 and professional development opportunities for teachers and supplemental lessons for students through Project Share.

A recap of ALAN 2013

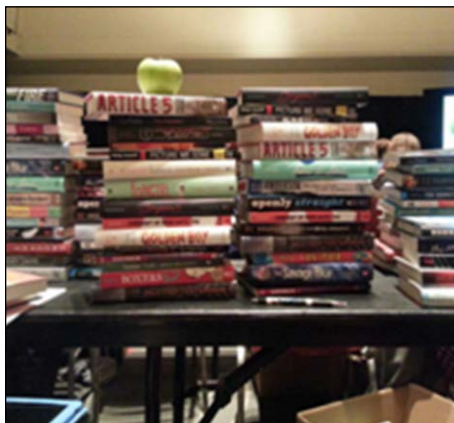
By Margaret Hale, Ed. D., SLATE/NCTE Liaison

Each year, the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN) hosts a workshop featuring a stream of authors of young adult literature speaking about their books, their writing process, and a host of other interesting tidbits about their writing lives. The workshop always takes place the Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week (immediately following the close of NCTE), and attracts a crowd of 400+.

One of the big highlights of attending ALAN is the box of books participants receive upon checking in Monday morning. Publishers donate the books and each year the box seems to get bigger. This year's box weighed 40 lbs or more! The authors of many of the books included are scheduled to speak at some point during the two-day workshop, and participants can have the books autographed after the author speaks. Several authors commented that as they look out at the audience of teachers and librarians, they simply see heads peeking out above fortresses of books!

Some of the high points this year included speeches from Chris Crutcher, author of many books including his most recent *Period 8*, and Laurie Halse Anderson, author of *Speak* among many other titles.

Crutcher started the day off Monday with a rousing talk about not only his books, but about education as well. When asked which of his books Crutcher would most like to be remembered for, he responded that *Whale Talk* would be the one he would choose. Crutcher has spent lots of time working with troubled teenagers as a counselor, and he shared with the audience that after listening to what some of his alternative education students had been through in their lives, his definition of a hero was forever changed. In speaking about education and educators, Crutcher shared his belief that people who are not educators are stealing the lives and careers of educators everywhere, and that we need to fight to keep that from happening. This statement was met with an enormous round of applause. Crutcher is definitely one of the authors who is on the side of educators!



Tuesday morning began with a keynote address by Laurie Halse Anderson. Anderson is always a favorite at the ALAN workshop. Two years ago in Chicago, Anderson came up to the podium to speak and immediately suffered an attack of vertigo of some sort and ended up lying behind the podium with the microphone held over her so she could finish giving her speech. Her dedication to teachers and readers shone through at that moment! She referred to that incident this year but promised to remain standing for the duration of her speech!

Anderson shared with the audience that books hook readers the moment something real happens, and she always makes sure that her books are real. She believes that good books build strong, resilient souls, that good books open hearts, and that good books change lives. Anderson reminded the group that we need to make sure we are putting energy into building our own resilience and that we balance our own scars with muscle because kids need us.

Anderson's book *Speak* celebrates its 15th anniversary this year, and Anderson and her publisher are currently working on adapting it into a graphic novel format. Her newest novel, *The Impossible Knife of Memory*, is, according to Anderson, her most personal novel since *Speak*.

For more information about this year's ALAN workshop, view the storify from [day one](#) and [day two](#). grithale@aol.com

Academic writing as participation: Learning and the production of knowledge in the secondary English class—with Sheridan Blau and Adele Bruni

By Valerie Taylor, Co-Editor, *English in Texas*

During this session at NCTE, the presenters described and demonstrated a form of academic writing, writing they defined as a contribution to knowledge in a field, in an academic community. Sheridan Blau, distinguished lecturer at Teachers College at Columbia University in New York, shared that high school and college teachers need to help students enter this world of academic writing. To do this scaffolding, Blau asks his graduate students to write a "commentary" to what they are reading for class each week, and each week to also write a reply to someone else's commentary. When the students ask what the requirements for a commentary will be, Blau responds that they "will see," that the characteristics or features of a commentary will grow from the writing within that community about that academic work.

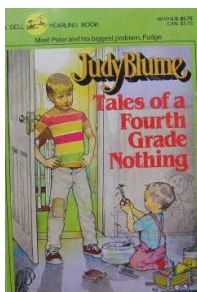
Adele Bruni, a high school teacher and also one of Blau's graduate students, decided she would try this technique with her students, too. She wanted to address the problem of how to get students to talk with a text instead of just talking around it. She began the work with her students, considering the following questions: (1) How do we get students to engage with what they perceive to be a challenging text? (2) How do we create and foster an academic community within the classroom? and (3) How do we cultivate academic writing?

What Bruni realized, though, was that her high school students needed a bit more scaffolding than Blau's graduate students. She helped guide them to consider the questions they should have as they began

continued on page 13

“You’re Judy Blume!” Reflections on the Opening General Session, NCTE 2013 Annual Convention

By Molly Adams, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates



No Tony Danza? What? The opening general session of NCTE on Thursday, November 21, 2013, was to showcase the latest insights on education by actor Tony Danza, whose recent stint as a high school teacher in Philadelphia led not only to a complete change of his professional philosophy, but also to a book, *I'd Like to Apologize to Every Teacher I've Ever Had*. What teacher would not want to hear that?

The news of Danza's sudden absence came as quite a shock to the eagerly waiting audience of thousands. NCTE leaders explained that Danza had been in a minor accident resulting in some broken ribs and a brief hospital stay, much to the chagrin of many. However, the “stand-in” for the night was none other than the unflappable Judy Blume, a much beloved author of so many teachers there, many whom, like this writer, read every single one of her books as a young adult.

Blume was scheduled to receive the 2013 NCTE/SLATE National Intellectual Freedom Award the night of Danza's address and then later present at the ALAN meeting that occurred just after NCTE, both events recognizing her body of work as a writer as well as her tireless fight against censorship and student rights to read throughout her professional life. Although there to receive her award that night in the session already, Blume graciously stepped in for the keynote presentation on short notice in a most unconventional but refreshing manner: she pulled up a plush leather chair alongside her moderator, a longtime publisher and friend from Simon and Schuster. Their conversation ran the gamut, from personal life growing up in Elizabeth, NJ, to her latest foray into the movie industry, the film version of *Tiger Eyes*, published originally in the 1980s, now made into a *film* by her son, Lawrence Blume. Though initially tentative about having her book made into a film, especially one with such personal ties to her own life (the plot is somewhat inspired by Blume's father's sudden death when she was 21), knowing it was “Larry's” favorite story of hers helped. The film will be released later this month in select theaters, and Blume beamed with pride about her son's, and her own, collaboration on this venture.

Blume's books have delighted millions for decades, and when questioned about more being made into films or which ones were her favorites, Blume mentions that some titles are just sacred to her, holding a special place in her heart. It was too hard to choose which ones were dearest, but *Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret* was mentioned. Nods and smiles ensued in the audience, as women across the ballroom felt a little twinge of nostalgia when they first read *Margaret* and thought about the fact that books could teach people a thing or two about growing up. *Tiger Eyes* has often been lauded as one of Blume's most seminal and remarkable works.

Though often classified as a “banned” author, Blume maintains that she is simply trying to write real stories that connect with real people and real issues those people face. Her candor and conversational approach to speaking was charming and engaging, and although she felt her husband was “the most disappointed of all” in Danza's absence, she served as a delightful “replacement” as

speaker. Audience members reconnected with a powerful voice of their developmental years, which not only made them laugh, but made them think differently about growing up.

Blume related a touching story in the closing remarks of her address about a time she felt nervous about confronting public opinion and talking to other people about her work purposes for writing. Despite audience incredulity at Blume's having nerves about anything, she went on to explain her son Lawrence's response to this concern: “But you're Judy Blume.” And she is. She was and is and will be. Her books remain timeless and needing no update; their truths are universal and provide a window into young adult transitions that few authors provide in such an accessible and engaging way. She closed her address with the encouragement to no longer lend out old copies of her books, but to buy the new copies of her books, with brilliantly redesigned covers, so students discover a “new” writer rather than an old writer.

Judy Blume still advocates change. She still makes her readers think, young or old. She is still there, fighting the good fight for students to have the right to read whatever engages them. And now, she even tweets about it. Clearly, she is Judy Blume, and she is still relevant.

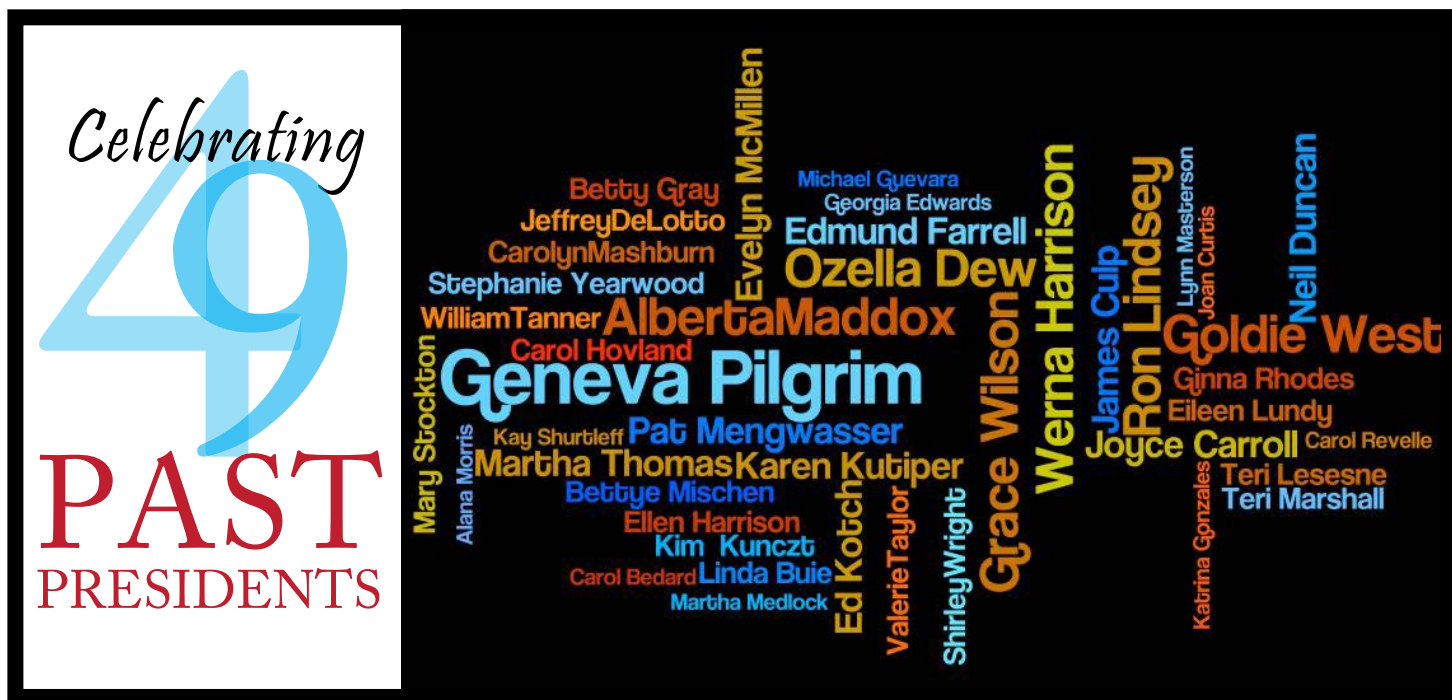
Readers can follow Judy Blume on Twitter [@judyblume](https://twitter.com/judyblume) or via her personal website, www.judyblume.com. Find out more about the release of *Tiger Eyes*, the film at <http://tigereyesmovie.com/fridayswithfrogs@gmail.com>

Connect with Molly Adams, whose favorite Blume book is still *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* and still possesses her original 1980s reprint copy, via twitter [@finchgirl10](https://twitter.com/finchgirl10).

Follow TCTELA
on Twitter: @tctela

twitter





Click on the image above or go to <http://www.tctela.org/about> to learn more about our past leaders!

Blazing the trails of literacy leadership: Spotlight on TCTELA past-president, Dr. Carol Bedard

By Kim Pinkerton, Vice President-Elect for Membership and Affiliates

I often find that in front of every impactful literacy mentor there is another influential literacy educator who burned a path on the English Language Arts trail to make the journey passable. The paths that I took to become the literacy teacher educator, writer, TCTELA board member, and presenter that I am today were forged by others before me; those trailblazers were my guides. I certainly would not have believed that I could have served TCTELA as both the *English in Texas* Editor and Vice President-Elect for Membership and Affiliates had it not been for Dr. Carol Bedard.

As a new faculty member at the University of Houston-Downtown in 2007, I listened as Carol praised the leaders of TCTELA, with whom she had collaborated since her term as recording secretary in 2006. I watched in awe as she worked on conference preparation and engaged in important testimony regarding the ELAR TEKS revisions. In 2008, Carol became TCTELA President and then served as Past-President in 2009. I remember thinking about the importance of what she was doing and

feeling as if I could never be responsible for such essential leadership in our field. What I did not realize was that she was creating my path for me. In 2009, she took my hand and led me to that path that she had formed when she asked me to join her and Dr. Leigh Van Horn as *English in Texas* Editors.

Although Carol has moved on from UHD and is now serving as the Director of Literacy Curriculum and Instruction for Houston Independent School District, we still talk regularly, and I know that our conversations are critical catalysts for who I will be in the future. Part of our most recent conversation revolved around her role as TCTELA President. Carol said, "The focus of my tenure as TCTELA President was essential conversations. In the twenty-first century, literacy is taking many forms, websites, texting, digital libraries... and knowledge itself is being created and shared in new and exciting ways. What remains constant though is the primacy of creating, exploring, inquiring, experimenting, growing, and reflecting with friends and colleagues.

It is people that make TCTELA a vital organization."

I love thinking about the people of TCTELA, the current leaders and the members who will lead us in the future. I relish the essential conversations that we have had and will have as the leading English language arts organization in Texas. It brings me delight to think about the literacy paths that are still to be completed.

After serving TCTELA from 2006-2012, Carol has moved on to lead in other areas of Texas. And, I am standing now in the path that she left for me. I am serving TCTELA and loving every moment. I cannot yet see the paths that I am making, but thanks to Dr. Carol Bedard, I know that my path, her path, our path will be followed by many others who will make even more enhancements to what we now know in literacy education. As Carol said, the people do make the difference; it is exciting to think about which members of our TCTELA membership will find a path, take it, and then burn their own anew.

pinkertonk@uhd.edu

TESTIMONIALS

On Martha Medlock

By Brian Bass, Recording Secretary

I met Martha in 2008 at a Heart of Texas Writing retreat. We were in the same group, and I could not help but be impressed with her poise, her passion, and her enthusiasm she revealed during our group discussion. In 2010, I “met” Martha again as I sat before her in an interview for an ELA position. That day, I learned that not only was Martha Medlock poised, passionate, and enthusiastic about her profession, but she was also one tenacious interviewer. Martha has profoundly influenced my professional journey, and I am blessed to be led by someone who cares about me as a person and as a professional and pushes me to grow and to serve. Martha’s contributions to me, to the profession, and to this organization are far-reaching. Thank you, Martha, for the gifts you have given and will continue to provide. bassb@ltisdschools.org

On Dr. Joyce Armstrong Carroll

By Kay Shurtleff, President

As anyone who has met her knows, Dr. Carroll is an unforgettable force in literacy education. I met her first in 1996 when I attended my first New Jersey Writing Project in Texas conference. I was in awe of her knowledge and accomplishments as Co-Director of the project and thought of her as inaccessible to a newbie English teacher like myself. She, however, saw it differently. She made a point to ask me not only about sessions I’d attended but--gasp!--my opinions about my profession. That day, and every one since, she has been a constant—a source of deep understanding about the way kids learn and the way we ought to teach—a mentor, an advisor, and a cheerleader for my own career. She guided me from my initial certification as an NJWPT (now Abydos) Trainer through my diamond level certification last year. I live professionally in her debt. Kay.Shurtleff@Region10.org

On Alana Morris

By Kay Shurtleff, President

I nicknamed Alana Morris “Beacon” a long time ago. Never afraid to step up and be counted, she continuously does the right thing for kids and teachers. When nothing makes sense, I can look to Alana to be the light leading the way. When I was a classroom teacher, she was one of my mentors. She visited my classroom, encouraged me beyond what I deserved, and was an incessant energetic stream of ideas and help. She made me believe I knew what I was doing! When she was serving as President of TCTELA, she convinced me to become a more active member by involving me in committee work. At the risk of sounding trite, the rest is history! Kay.Shurtleff@Region10.org

On Katrina Gonzales

By Kay Shurtleff, President

In many ways, I have literally followed in Katrina’s footsteps. She mentored me when she served as Vice President and I as Vice President-elect and again when she was President and I President-elect. I watched her work to establish the TCTELA board as a team, and she taught me by example and by patient conversation. This year, as President, I’ve relied on her steady, thoughtful insights and advice. I admire the devotion she has to her students and the tenacity that drives her. Katrina is a leader in all the best ways. Kay.Shurtleff@Region10.org

On Amy Blakely, Executive Director

By Kay Shurtleff, President

Amy is the silent partner of every President of TCTELA. As Executive Director, she sees everything, she manages the thousands of “behind the scenes” events that have to happen in order to put on a conference, and she enables our organization to put its best foot forward. She has wisdom, a history with our organization, and an extraordinary work ethic that makes her indispensable to us. Although her leadership is not always visible to all the members, Amy is truly a leader among leaders. Kay.Shurtleff@Region10.org

On Kay Shurtleff

By Joan Vaughan, Co-Chair Early Childhood Committee

About 12 years ago, I finally admitted I could not teach writing. Despite my sincerest efforts, my students’ writing was not improving. I assigned, they wrote; I corrected, they recopied. I would “lather, rinse, and repeat” the next week, with exactly the same results. After much soul-searching, I decided it was not my fault; I reasoned writers are born, not made, so... “forged about it.” Science would be a good teaching field.

Then, I met Kay Shurtleff, who was, apparently, actually teaching writing to actual kids, whose writing actually improved, and who actually considered themselves as writers. She was not (I know this because I checked carefully) in some Ivory Tower with gifted students, but in a classroom like mine with diversity, poverty and hormones. Unlike me, however, she had discovered ways to teach writers.

It was Kay who taught me about modeling, about writing with, for, and in front of students, about embedding grammar instruction and the power of mentor texts, and about absorbing the ideology of the greats like Murray, Atwell, Caulkins, Gallagher and Anderson. When I, isolated in my school as the only writing workshop teacher, ran into daunting obstacles, it was Kay who answered my desperate emails, encouraging me to “keep on keeping on” and assuring me it would get better.

And it did. I’m not saying I’ll ever conference like Karl Anderson, keep records like Nancie Atwell, or hold pithy conversations on the level of Penny Kittle, but I did learn to help kids enjoy writing, see themselves as writers, and experience the power of their own written words.

Last week I got a letter from a senior I had taught in fifth grade who told me she is going in to journalism because I had encouraged her writing. Whenever this happens, I wish I could go back and apologize to all those “pre-Kay Shurtleff” students, whose writing I probably stunted irreparably. In many ways, my successes are as much Kay’s as mine... a kind of multi-level marketing plan, if you will; had she not led the way showing me what could be done and how to do it, I would still be convinced teaching writing cannot be done. And probably teaching science. joanmargotvaughan@gmail.com

On Carol Revelle

By Molly Adams, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

Carol Revelle's resume is impressive. As Senior Lecturer and Director of the President's EDGE program at the University of North Texas and with a list of conference presentations, publications, and research work a mile long, most people would think Dr. Revelle might not have time for them. This could not be further from the truth. The real truth is in the details of that resume. The President's EDGE Program at UNT is actually a university initiative that supports staff members at UNT working towards a GED and completing their education. Those conference presentations include skyping with authors, using peer journals, and promoting social justice. Recently Dr. Revelle has acquired grant funding to develop a Texas-based Holocaust Institute education program for teachers. Dr. Revelle also serves on several boards and committees that align with her beliefs in connecting with students, building teacher leaders, and promoting advocacy on various levels for educators and pre-service teachers. For the North Star of Texas Writing Project (NSTWP), she currently serves as a teacher consultant and serves on the leadership board as a Co-Director of Advocacy. She also serves as the new SCOA Representative for Region 6 of NCTE and as a member of both the Texas Association for the Improvement of Reading's (TAIR) board and NCTE's Committee Against Censorship. Somewhere in the middle of all of this, Dr. Revelle took time to become the President of TCTELA from 2010-2011, and held several other positions on that same board. Dr. Revelle, so far, has lived a busy, albeit determined, professional life.

To me, she is just Carol. She is my friend and colleague, my co-developer of all things PR and Advocacy within the NSTWP leadership team, and every time we meet I learn something new from Carol. Her dedication to social justice and developing teachers as leaders is refreshing and inspiring. The involvement of teacher colleagues in smaller, more remote areas is never far from her plans, and her enduring personal desire to teach and learn makes her an endearing and treasured collaborator. Carol nominated me to this board a couple of years ago

because she believed in me. I am a product of that passion, involvement, mentoring, and dedication to fostering the best virtues of the profession of teaching. She is a prolific writer and person of great heart.

Thank you, Carol, for your belief in all of us, your hope for our profession, and your action towards real social and educational change. Do not quit. Do not stop learning, advocating, and teaching. We are right behind you, following your lead.
fridayswithfrogs@gmail.com

To learn more about Dr. Revelle, follow her on Twitter at @drrev, or connect with her via her faculty information at UNT, <https://www.coe.unt.edu/facultystaff-department/carol-l-revelle>.

On Joan Curtis

By Molly Adams, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

Dr. Joan Scott Curtis has done more than serve as a past president of TCTELA from 2009-2010. She has been, and still is, one of the most powerful writing mentors in my life.

Auntie Joan, as I am often wont to call her, was one of the first smiling faces I encountered as the 2009 Summer Institute opened for the North Star of Texas Writing Project. She was currently involved with TCTELA leadership at the time, and so began our conversation: about education leadership and finding one's voice as a writer. This two-part conversation has continued over the years, and though we have not met as frequently as I would have liked in the last year or so, it could not be for a better reason. Auntie Joan has achieved so many of her lifelong goals in such a short time: she has published both a children's book and her memoirs, both dreams now made reality. *The Number Fairy* is a delightful children's book about the fairy that hangs the numbers on birthdays for us and has played an active role in helping children access the joy of reading, even that which seems to elude them at school. In her recent blog post on *The Nerdy Book Club's* site, Joan explains how just the right book can help a child develop a love or even an interest in reading. Joan believes lives can be "changed forever" by the right book.

This commitment to one-on-one connections with readers extends to Joan's interactions with writers, including me. Just the right experience, book, and writing task can help anyone develop a love or even the confidence to try writing. My involvement in the TCTELA board, and my subsequent courage to attempt to publish, is in great part due to Joan's influence, passion, and her own personal courage as a writer. By digging into some sweet, but often painful, family narratives and memories, Joan collected just the right "number" of stories for her memoir, *Just Keep Breathing*. I remember talking with Joan about her idea of this book, and its early inception as a blog. She allowed me to read some of it, and its impact was palpable: at any age, writing can carry you, at any age, writing can save you, and at any age, writing can change the reader.

So we come full circle to the impact of both of her works, which is not unlike her impact as a teacher leader and former leader of this organization. Joan's personal approach to connecting with educators, and students, is remarkable and sublime. She is kind, compassionate, patient, forgiving, and supportive. She always builds a bridge when there is conflict and there seems to be no solution. She always sees the best in educators. She always embodies the values that make teaching such an honorable profession. She always inspires, she always attempts to connect, she always takes time she does not have, and she always finds time to write about her experiences. This organization is a stronger and more effective movement for change because of the compassionate influence of leaders like Dr. Joan Scott Curtis.

When I get my act together, I hope I am half the leader, and successful writer, she is. She is a touchpoint in my life, a milestone in my education, and a constant distant (and hopefully sometimes close-up) mentor in my writing journey. Thank you for your service and your guidance, Auntie Joan. Just keep breathing. We are all still here... we are all still in this together.

fridayswithfrogs@gmail.com

Connect with Dr. Curtis via Denton ISD, where she serves as Secondary ELA and World Languages Coordinator. She is also the district liaison for the North Star of Texas Writing Project.

On Linda Buie

By Molly Adams, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

Linda Buie currently serves as the Dean of Instruction and IB Head-of-School at Longview High School, and her long list of accomplishments include serving as president of TCTELA from 2001-2002. When she was awarded the Edmund J. Farrell Distinguished Lifetime Service Award in 2013, I could not have been more proud. I know her. I worked with her. I know all those things they say about her are true. In her recommendation, Mrs. Buie is called an “icon in the field” and a “good steward” of this organization and the profession, and her coordination of the Achievement Awards in Writing for NCTE is something I personally have worked on with her. I know how hard she works, how tirelessly she pushes for excellence, how passionately she approaches the quality of both advanced and standard education, and how honestly committed she is to personal and professional integrity.

I worked under Mrs. Buie’s leadership at Longview High School from 2009-2012, and often went to her with questions about navigating the new environs and procedures of such a large high school. She answered every one. When the curriculum was under scrutiny, she always rose to the occasion, supporting her teachers and what was best for students. When the level of stress was high as school budgets took hits in the last several years, Mrs. Buie always kept her cool, was dependable, and was accessible. She always exhibits class, grace, professionalism, and a keen dedication for promoting educational distinction in the classroom and at an administrative level. Her unflagging energy and perseverance as a teacher and mentor makes her outstanding in her field, and it is clear that a lifetime of those same commitments and integrity have helped her chart this course. This organization could not be represented more commendably than how Linda Buie lives those values out loud as an administrator, educator, writer, and mentor. And she is still there, slugging it out in the classroom, each year, teaching dual credit and making connections with today’s students. Her ideas remain progressive, fresh, and relevant.

Linda Buie could have gone so many places and done so many different things with her ideas, her leadership, her expertise. The fact that she remains right there in the arena, teaching students, and trying to enrich the profession, is admirable, and is the epitome of a lifetime of achievement in teaching and learning. Mrs. Buie would tell you she has learned from so many and her success is the success of those mentors on whose shoulders she stands; her uniquely unassuming brand of confidence is always grounded in humility and elegant grace. This is one of my favorite things about Mrs. Buie. Every time I see her I feel warm and encouraged, and driven to have the same kind of class as an educator as I see in her.

I am only a better, and more intentionally professional, teacher for my few years spent teaching alongside and learning from Linda Buie. She leaves an indelible mark on all she meets, and this mark is a gift. You will want to be more professional, more gracious, more dedicated to excellence, just by spending a few minutes with her. We should all be so blessed to serve with such a celebrated leader in the field. fridayswithfrogs@gmail.com

Connect with Mrs. Linda Buie via Longview High School through their home page, and read the brilliant recommendation for her TCTELA Lifetime Achievement award on the TCTELA site.

On Joyce Armstrong Carroll, Ed.D., H.L.D.

By P. Tim Martindell, Ed.D., President-Elect

Dr. Joyce Armstrong Carroll, a visionary life-long educator also known as Dr. JAC or Joyce, has been working alongside countless English language arts teachers across Texas and the United States. Dr. Carroll has taught every grade level from primary to graduate school during her fifty-four year career. For the past thirty-six years, she has trained teachers in the teaching of writing as Co-director of Abydos Learning International, formerly known as the New Jersey Writing Project in Texas (NJWPT). The NJWPT began in 1977 as a partnership between Rutgers University, the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, and several, diverse New Jersey school districts. Several years later NJWPT was brought to Texas by Dr. Carroll and her husband, Edward Wilson, after it received the coveted National Dissemination

Network Project imprimatur. They, and over 500 Abydos Trainers, have been providing professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators in the English language arts ever since.

Dr. Carroll has been a recipient of the Edmund J. Farrell Lifetime Achievement Award from TCTELA. A nationally known consultant, she served as President-elect of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts in 1983-84, President in 1984-85, and Past President /NCTE Liaison in 1985-86. She also served on the National Council of Teachers of English’s Commission on Composition and as Chair of its Standing Committee Against Censorship for six years.

A prolific author, Dr. Carroll’s articles have appeared in journals such as *Curriculum Review*, *English Journal*, *Language Arts*, *Media & Methods*, *Southwest Philosophical Studies*, *Ohio English Journal*, *English in Texas*, and the *Florida English Journal*. Most recently, she has had two articles published in *School Library Monthly*. Carroll had two poems published in *College Composition and Communication*. With her husband Edward E. Wilson, Dr. Carroll co-authored *Acts of Teaching: How to Teach Writing*, now in its 2nd edition, and they together co-authored the award-winning *Poetry After Lunch: Poems to Read Aloud*, as well as the 2001 Prentice Hall national textbook series *Writing and Grammar: Communication in Action Series: Grades 6-12*.

Her other books include *Jesus Didn’t Use Worksheets: A 2000-Year-Old Model for Good Teaching*, co-authored with Ron Habermas, Ph.D., *Conclusions: The Unicorns of Composition*, *Dr. JAC’s Guide to Writing with Depth*, *The Best of Dr. JAC*, *Dr. JAC’s Reading and Writing Workshop Primer*, and *Dr. JAC’s Phonics Friendly Book*, *Authentic Strategies for High-Stakes ELA Tests*, *Inspiring the Classics through Children’s Literature*, *What Makes a Master Teacher*, *Dr. JAC’s Math, Reading, Writing Connections PreK-8* with Amy Wood, *Brushing Up on Grammar*, *Ratiocination: Weaving the Threads of Grammar*, *Revision and Editing*, *4 X 4: Practical Methods for Writing Persuasively*, and her latest book, *The Critical Writer*.

TCTELA proudly salutes Dr. Joyce Armstrong Carroll for her accomplishments as a celebrated author, dedicated teacher, and advocate for our profession.

ptmwriter@aol.com

SPORTS LITERACY ANNOUNCEMENT

***English Journal* Theme:**

A Whole New Ballgame:
Sports and Culture in the English Classroom

Deadline: January 15, 2014

Publication Date: September 2014

Guest Editors:

- Alan Brown (Wake Forest University)
- Chris Crowe (Brigham Young University)

Love sports or hate them, it's hard to deny their prominence in American society and their popularity with twenty-first century adolescents. Interscholastic athletics in particular can play a significant role in the overall culture of a school and have a substantial impact on students' daily lives. Despite this influence, the topic of sport in society is often absent from the professional conversations of English teachers, an exclusion that could prove to be a missed opportunity. This issue will examine the possibilities for both utilizing and critiquing the culture of sports as a means of increasing student engagement and promoting student learning in the English classroom. Within this context, we seek manuscripts that explore the intersection of literacy, sport, culture, and society, and we encourage column submissions devoted to this same theme.

A number of important questions guide this issue: What connections or disconnections exist between the perceived physical nature of athletics and the mental nature of academics? What real-world associations have you made between sports and the English curriculum? How can sports-related texts (e.g., young adult literature, canonical literature, graphic novels, poetry, nonfiction, magazines, newspapers) be integrated into the academic culture of an English class? How have you promoted the teaching of 21st century skills through the use of sports-related media, film, and technology? What possibilities exist for interdisciplinary (e.g., historical, political, scientific, social) connections to sports across content areas? How have you engaged students in critical dialogue about our societal emphasis on sports? How can we extend the definition of sport to be more inclusive for students of diverse cultures, races, genders, ethnicities, and abilities? How can an examination of sports culture open the door to discussions of other cultures that exist in school and society?

English Journal Call for Manuscripts

For more information about *English Journal*

To find out more about Chris Crowe

With questions or comments about this themed issue, contact Alan Brown or Chris Crowe.

This themed issue of *English Journal* is dedicated to the memory of Cap Lavin, a man who touched the lives of countless students, colleagues, and friends before passing away in February of 2013. Cap was a long-time English teacher, an outstanding basketball player and coach, and the co-founder of the Bay Area Writing Project, which later served as a model for the National Writing Project.

Cap served as an informal mentor to Alan Brown during the writing of his dissertation on core content area teacher-coaches. He is recognized in the acknowledgements section (p. V) of Alan's dissertation: <http://bit.ly/tchcoachdiss>.

For more on Cap's life: <http://bit.ly/CapLavin>

On his relationship with his son, St. John's basketball coach, Steve Lavin: <http://bit.ly/SteveLavin>

For a wonderful article on teaching English and coaching basketball: <http://bit.ly/LavinWooden>

Secondary section luncheon: Featuring Ishmael Beah

By Valerie Taylor, Co-Editor, *English in Texas*

Many have read Ishmael Beah's memoir *A Long Way Gone*, describing his experiences as a child soldier in Sierra Leone. It might be surprising to realize after reading this book how incredibly upbeat this 33-year-old man is. During the luncheon, Beah described his life as a child before the war, where he was learning English at school and mostly his native language at home. Because Sierra Leone had been a British colony from the early 1800s until 1961, English was the language of power, and Shakespeare's works were at the top of the list, according to Beah. Even before he understood what they meant, Beah says he recited the words, "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears." And he learned his first English word from his father, who, when he was frustrated with someone else, would call that person a "nincompoop"—a word Beah says his father told him not to repeat.



During his talk Beah also recounted that he comes from a culture filled with storytellers, where children and adults would gather to listen to stories designed to pass on the ethics and morals of behavior. Since the stories were shared orally, he had to listen deeply, for often the children were asked to retell the stories, a way to enforce that they were listening. (Sometimes, though, the storytellers would change parts of a well-known story to see if people were really listening.) The language of these stories and of everyday life for Beah is, he says, an imagistic one. For example, the word for box would be translated into English as a nest or vessel of air. As he writes, including in his new novel *Radiance of Tomorrow*, due out January 7, 2014, Beah tries to utilize the concept of the oral storytelling tradition and the imagist tradition of his first language.

Beah also discussed the way he uses his writing to move toward the future while dealing with the pull of the past. In his new novel he looks at the experiences of those coming back to Sierra Leone after the war because he realized that often people want to know about what happens during a war but not what happens after a war. In general, he wants his writing to show the strength of the human spirit, but his first book, *A Long Way Gone*, actually came out of his frustration regarding how little people outside of Sierra Leone really understood about the war happening there.

Writing to explain his life began earlier, though, with his first essay where he explained why he did not have a report card as he tried to enter school in New York. He then had a job as a letter writer, helping people communicate their needs and requests to others. Writing, whether fiction or nonfiction, he believes, is essential. At the end of his talk, Beah expressed that people need to write, or they allow others to dream for them. vfstaylor@sbcglobal.net

Academic writing as participation

continued from page 6

this work, such as what goes in a commentary, how long it should be, whether it should have textual evidence, whether it will have questions or uncertainties. To all of these questions, Bruni, like Blau, answered, "We'll see." The idea is that students will begin to understand this kind of academic writing as they are participating in it, as this academic community defines it through its work.

Commentaries, Bruni and Blau believe, allow students to write *into* their confusion, help them see the need to ground their writing in the text (using textual evidence to help their responders understand), teach them to rely on a classroom community, and lead to discovery of "footprints of thought" (Ruth Vinz). Students will need to consider what makes a provocative commentary, determining that it calls out for a response. They will also have to decide what makes an effective response, probably discovering that it responds to ideas. And they will also determine what makes a productive conversation—where they know more at the end than at the beginning.

This work with students, according to Blau and Bruni, will help transform commentaries and expand this genre if teachers ask students to reflect on their work through a commentary audit, an idea from Dan Kirby. The audit occurs at the end of a set of commentaries, and students are asked to choose their best commentary and explain why it is the best, or to choose the best conversation and explain why it is the best, or to choose a commentary or conversation that could be better and explain what would make it more productive. All of this work is guided by various theories: situated learning, apprenticeship models, legitimate peripheral participation and the zone of proximal development. Overall, Blau and Bruni propose that an academic genre develops through use in a community, and it changes over time. vfstaylor@sbcglobal.net

What's it worth?

Your Reputation
Your Integrity
Your Career
Expertise
Collaboration
Dependability
Inspiration
Relevance
Progress
Principles



IT'S INVALUABLE

The real value of
NCTE MEMBERSHIP
IT'S WELL WORTH IT



Renew your **NCTE** membership today. Visit ncte.org/renew or call 877-369-6283.

Meeting Ernest Hemingway: Interacting with “original” manuscripts at UMass Boston

By Molly Adams, TCTELA Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

NCTE attendees were invited to participate in a National Writing Project-sponsored event on Friday, November 22, 2013, during the NCTE Annual Convention, where they could interact with some original manuscripts of several of Ernest Hemingway's works. Bruce Rettman, a preeminent Hemingway scholar and former University of Massachusetts at Boston professor, presided over the off-site session, after the opening keynote at NCTE.

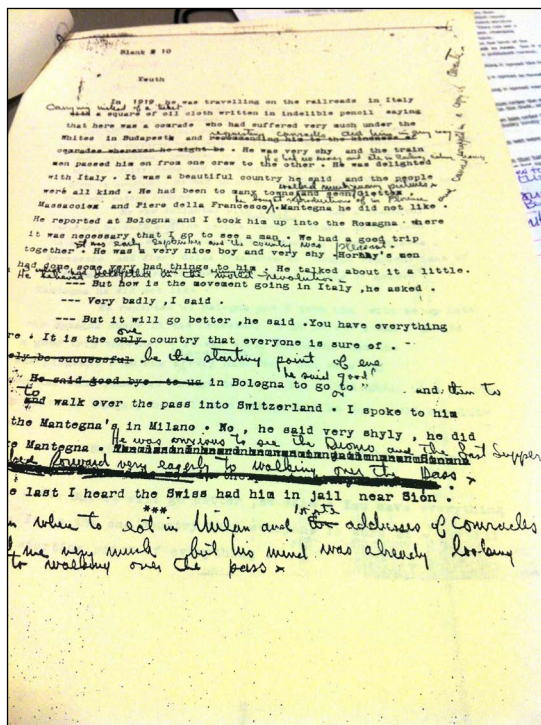
Rettman, an active leader in the Boston Writing Project and retired teacher, currently works with Chinese students at the Massachusetts International Academy in Marlborough, MA. He continues his research and publication about his work with Hemingway manuscripts and maintains a close relationship with curators of the exhibit at the nearby John Fitzgerald Kennedy Presidential Library. His work can be found published in various newspapers and journals, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Student Press Review*, and several local newspapers.

Mr. Rettman spread out photocopied original manuscripts of Hemingway's short stories and letters, including multiple drafts of "The Revolutionist" and draft revisions of sentences from various works by Hemingway. Attendees were able to put their hands on these copies, decades old themselves, and listen to Rettman discuss the power of manuscript revision and how this creates new stories, just within the spaces between diction and punctuation that change from one draft to the next.

"When you 're-vision,' you make new meaning," Rettman says, as he clutches his ancient Scribner's edition and reads passages aloud. Attendees follow along on first, second and third draft revisions as he reads about the "revolutionist" in post-WWI Europe, on more of a vacation than a mission.

"Your reader response is really important," Rettman continues, listing the interactive readers' notes about confusions, questions, syntax, characters, and diction being critical to understanding a writer's revision process. "When we're talking about revision, it can be a huge change in a piece."

Rettman contends that what was once sacred can become secular in revision, and vice versa, noting Hemingway's terse, cryptic style as both a point of irritation as well as



Manuscripts as part of Mr. Rettman's personal papers.

intrigue for any reader. The attendees in this session included two high school teachers, a professor, and an elementary school librarian, all with limited knowledge of and varying affections for Hemingway, but all with a love of learning about the craft of writing.

It is important to read the "fine print" on conference programs, or attendees miss an opportunity like this: to sit at the feet of a master, to learn about a master, and to master

the art of revision in writing and in life. To lay hands on such articles of history carries its own power, love of Hemingway or not.

When readers re-vision what they think of great writers, like Hemingway, whether they like him or not, whether they have read *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or not, they can create new meaning as educators. They have the opportunity to "revise" what they think revision actually means.

For more information about the Hemingway collection at the JFK Library, visit <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/The-Ernest-Hemingway-Collection.aspx> or read this article in the *LA Times* <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/aug/26/local/me-38411>. For more information about this off-site session during NCTE, see the session blurb on NWP's site, <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/13am/friday.csp>.

And for more information and to connect with Bruce Rettman about his Hemingway scholarship, find his contact information at his current teaching post's site, <http://www.maiaacademy.org/mr-rettman/>. He would gladly give tours and work with you on the manuscripts simply because he loves the research, if time away from teaching permits. He might even give you a ride to your next destination. fridayswithfrogs@gmail.com

Connect with Molly via Twitter [@finchgirl10](https://twitter.com/finchgirl10).



NCTE session handouts are available online at:

<http://ncte.connectedcommunity.org/2013Browse>

CONNECT. GET ENERGIZED. (Re) INVENT YOUR FUTURE

ANNUAL CONVENTION NCTE BOSTON 2013

(Re) Inventing the Future of English

Hynes Convention Center, Boston • November 21–24, 2013
Postconvention Workshops, November 25–26, 2013

"NCTE nourishes the heart, the brain, and the soul."
—Society, NCTE member

Register by November 1, 2013 and save! Member \$250 • Nonmember \$325 • Student Member \$100

For Convention information, visit www.ncte.org/annual or call NCTE Customer Service at 877-369-6283.

When sports mimic life: The struggle for gender equality

By Katrina Gonzales, Past-President

Her long brown ponytail cascades from the football helmet. While the other players on the team compete in relative anonymity, the lone girl is identifiable, targetable, and defiant. She has fought her way to a spot in a sport dominated by males, which, in itself, speaks volumes; however, she takes for granted that she exemplifies the push for equality in more than one way. CJ Covarrubias is female and Hispanic.



CJ, one of a handful of females ever to don a football uniform in our little 1A school, knows the challenges and the rewards of playing football. On top of that, her unquenchable thirst for a good read keeps her on top of her game in the ELA classroom as well. Recently, though, as I prepared for the NCTE Convention in Boston at which I was a table moderator, I spoke with my students about their favorite sports books. Students tossed titles at me as easily as they threw footballs on the field. Next, I asked them to give me some of their favorite titles with a multicultural slant. While a bit more taxing, authors such as Matt de la Peña and Walter Dean Myers provided them with a few titles they could toss my way.

“How about those sports titles with multicultural protagonists who are females?” I asked next. A couple of hands tentatively went up only to resignedly go down, heavy sighs included. We had hit a defensive wall. A bulwark that can only be penetrated by young adult authors and publishers choosing to provide us with sports books containing strong female protagonists of an ethnic background other than Caucasian.

Undaunted by the realization that Young Adult sports books seemed limited to male and, more often than not, Caucasian protagonists, my 8th grade student, CJ, returned the next day with a new composition book, baseball on the cover, of course. “You know, Mrs. G,” she started. “After we talked yesterday, I decided that, if there weren’t any sports book with female Mexican-American protagonists, I needed to write one.”

“OK... Let’s have a look,” I returned. Lo and behold, CJ’s words had tumbled out onto these pages. All of her pride, all of her dreams, all of her angst. The beginning of a novel that could inspire

other girls like CJ to choose their own playing field.

CJ continued to write her novel until I left for the NCTE Convention in Boston. Agreeing to let me carry the composition book containing her novel to Boston, CJ stayed behind in my classroom while I ventured to the East Coast carrying a huge piece of her heart between those pages.

In its third year at the NCTE Convention, Dr. Alan Brown’s session, *The Intersection of Literacy, Sport, Culture, and Society* draws a crowd. The session begins with about four current Young Adult authors exploring a particular aspect of literacy, sport, culture, and society. Participants then gather around topic roundtables which focus on an even deeper topic within the realm of sports and literacy. This year, 2013, roundtable discussions such as *No Lines Drawn: Exploring Multicultural YA Sports Literature* shared space with other discussions like *Addiction and Redemption in Smashed: Extending the Discussion of Teen Women and Sports* and *Bullying and Sports: How Students can Leverage Against Bullying*.

How do these discussions impact our ELA classrooms? How can we bring these topics to our students? Athletic coaches understand that the worlds of the basketball courts, the ice hockey rinks, the field hockey fields, and the softball diamonds mimic life. A microcosm of what teenagers experience in the world outside of sports bounces around and plays out in the actions of the team. Friendships are forged; personal goals achieved; and clashing personalities amended.

In Room 303 many of my eighth grade students select novels containing stories which mimic situations in their own lives: bullying, dating violence, single parents, the struggle to belong. Often, sports provides a backdrop in these novels. Whether sports draws the student to the novel because of the student’s interest in that arena, or the book contains conflict which intrigues the student, Young Adult novels provide students that imaginary space in which to connect to what they love.

What happens when a student cannot find a book which connects to his or her own situation such as my student, CJ? Young Adult author, Lisa Luedke, experienced the same absence of reading material that spoke to her as a female sports participant. She stated, “Just like in real life, I want the girls to have a place. Sports gives them that.”

Katie, the protagonist in Luedke’s novel, *Smashed*, is a promising field hockey star when several flagrant fouls complicate her life. While hope reigns in this novel, Katie battles alcoholism, the secrets that come with the disease, and a violent boyfriend. Whether a girl plays sports or not, *Smashed* more likely mirrors her life than other sports books simply because the protagonist is female.

My student CJ wrote in an editorial piece to our local newspaper, “I want to tell everybody I don’t care if I’m a girl—I will play. I’ll show everybody that girls can play anything and do anything they want. I really hope that I can encourage more girls to play. I want to make a change in our little town.”

continued on page 17

Texas affiliates honored at NCTE Annual Convention

By Jennifer Engle, *Texas Voices* Editor

The 2013 NCTE Annual Convention offered several opportunities for the nation's affiliates to gather throughout the weekend. During the Affiliate Representative Meeting and the "(Re) Inventing Your Affiliate" session, leaders from across the nation networked with mutually invested colleagues, discussed concerns, and shared successful strategies. But the annual Affiliate Breakfast, always held on the last day of the conference, is purely celebratory as NCTE's Standing Committee on Affiliates (SCOA) recognizes achievements in ten different categories.

The **Affiliate Excellence Award** might seem like the pinnacle award delivered at the breakfast as it reflects the remarkable goings-on in the affiliate as a whole. Established in 1996, the award "recognizes NCTE affiliates that meet high standards of performance for affiliate programming to promote improvement in the teaching of the English language arts."

TCTELA was one of eight award winners this year, receiving the accolade for its fifth year. The Texas state affiliate, one of the largest in the country, produces a reputable annual conference, award-winning publications, and a valuable Website while maintaining consistent communication with its membership. These are just some of the requisite criteria to be eligible for the award.

In addition, **Concho Valley Teachers of English (CVTE)**, an NCTE affiliate located in San Angelo, Texas, won the Affiliate Excellence Award for its first year and the **Affiliate Website Award**. A plaque is presented to the winner of the latter award which judges affiliate Website's on seven criteria: navigation, content, speed, privacy, size, links, and networking features beyond the Website. In



Members of the TCTELA Board accepting their awards - L to R: past-president Katrina Gonzales, executive secretary Alana Morris, *Texas Voices* editor Jennifer Engle, president Kay Shurtleff, vice-president Molly Adams, and president-elect Tim Martindell.

only its fourth year as an affiliate, CVTE has maintained a steady membership, but at just over 20 members each year, the small regional group has proven that numbers do not necessarily win awards; organizations with dedicated leaders do.

NCTE encourages all affiliates to apply for as many awards as may be applicable to their group. The application process can be a perfect way to sift through the inner workings of the affiliate and make significant improvements for a more efficient, effective organization. All awards are described on the NCTE Website. Jennifer.Engle@saisd.org

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Publication: *English in Texas* Volume 44.1 (Spring/Summer 2014)

Theme: Lead the Way

Call for Professional Submissions (Deadline: April 1st, 2014):

The 2014 TCTELA conference theme is Lead the Way. We encourage you to consider how you have initiated new ways of teaching literacy in your classroom or in your school. How have you "blazed a trail" or "led the way" for new kinds of teaching, technology, and literacy learning? Has your teaching influenced others? What was your break through and how did others respond to your new way of teaching? How have you demonstrated leadership in the literacy field? Have you influenced others by your guidance, modeling, or examples? If so, how? Have you piloted any new programs, technology tools, or practices that others have embraced? Based on your leadership and innovations, how have other educators, including your students, expanded their literacy horizons to a more inclusive and/or expansive perspective?

Share your research, your classroom practices, professional development opportunities, and/or personal communications that have in some way instigated new ways of teaching literacy and how your teaching impacted other teachers' literacy practices.

Call for Student Submissions (Deadline: May 1st, 2014):

With the advancement of digital tools for both capturing and making public our thoughts and ideas, we now have a variety of ways to express ourselves. Twitter, web blogs, Vine videos, and computers have become everyday vehicles for creativity and innovation. With these new tools in mind, we invite students to consider the ways they have "blazed the trail" in documenting their lives or in producing high quality written or multimedia work for school projects. Students, have you mentored others in their development of similar projects? How has your use of digital tools changed how you view school? What questions have you encountered about the appropriateness of particular content or availability of particular tools at school?

Fiction for all ages

By Margaret Hale, SLATE/NCTE Representative

As human beings, stories tug at our hearts and minds because we are predisposed to the structure of narrative. Stories bring us together and help us remember things. Stories speak to us. Here are a few stories that will speak to the child in each of us. Enjoy!



The Center of Everything by Linda Urban

Many of us have regrets, and twelve-year-old Ruby Pepperdine is no different. She regrets that she did not listen to her grandmother Gigi as Gigi was dying; she regrets hurting her best friend Lucy's feelings; and she regrets that her new friendship with Nero has not gotten off to a good start.

Ruby has hopes like most people as well. She hopes that reading her winning essay on Bunning Day will help solve some of her problems. And she hopes that the wish she made for her twelfth birthday will come true.

The Center of Everything will capture your middle grade readers' hearts as many of them will identify with Ruby, her regrets, and her hopes.



Flora and the Flamingo by Molly Idle

Flora and the Flamingo, by Molly Idle, is a delightful wordless picture book about a young dancer named Flora and the unusual friendship she creates with a beautiful flamingo.

Flora wants to dance gracefully, like the flamingo, but she struggles to dance with the same kind of grace and poise. Flora works hard at imitating the flamingo without the flamingo noticing. But the flamingo notices, and at first appears annoyed with Flora. Eventually, though, the flamingo continues to model graceful moves for Flora until she finally masters them. By the end of the story, the flamingo and Flora dance gracefully and joyfully in tandem.

Beautiful illustrations as well as a participatory format that allows readers to lift the flaps to reveal more illustrations that further the story will make this book a hit with young girls!



Period 8 by Chris Crutcher

Crutcher's books are always favorites of mine, and his newest, *Period 8*, is no exception. Many high schools have a teacher or two who are skilled at providing a safe place for kids to talk, to vent, to be themselves. At Heller High School, that safe place is in Bruce Logsdon's classroom during the lunch period, period 8.

Mr. Logs, as the students call him, is skilled at helping kids share their concerns and fears and at getting them to speak honestly. However, one of the students, Paulie Bomb, is so honest in Period 8 that it costs him his relationship with his girlfriend, Hannah.

Then another one of the regulars, Mary Wells, who is typically rather quiet during Period 8, goes missing, and the group of students begins to feel that their safety and security in Period 8 has been compromised. Mr. Logs and his students venture out of the safety of Period 8 in an effort to find Mary and figure out what exactly is going on.

Crutcher writes about tough topics in his books but handles them well, and *Period 8* is no exception.



The Day the Crayons Quit by Drew Daywalt

This funny picture book tells the story of Duncan and his crayons. One day he opens his box of crayons, but there are no crayons to be found. All that remains is a stack of letters, each one of which has the same basic message: "We quit."

Each of the colors in the crayon box has written Duncan a note explaining exactly why they have quit. Pink wants to be used more. Blue is tired from coloring so much water and sky. Beige is tired of Brown always being more important.

Daywalt's humor reaches readers on both a child's level and an adult's level. Oliver Jeffers' wonderful illustrations help convey the crayons' messages. And each of the crayons' letters can serve as a mentor text for your students. I think teachers and kids alike will LOVE this great new picture book! grithale@aol.com

When sports mimic life: The struggle for gender equality

continued from page 15

Just as Young Adults sports novels contain limited numbers of female protagonists, young adult sports, while seeing great increases in female sports participation since Title IX, still experience limits on girls' participation. When CJ decided to play football in fourth grade, she stood out on the sidelines as the only girl. In her five years as a football player alongside her male teammates, CJ is considered simply another teammate, albeit the only one with a long ponytail. Her desire is that sports books with female protagonists become the norm, much like her feeling about being a female on the dominantly male football team.

Lisa Luedke explains, "Sports played a critical role in my life as they do in young people's lives. Sports. It's a place where you can be yourself. When everything else in your life feels beyond your control, it's a very nice place to be." Similarly, curled up with a Young Adult sports book featuring a female protagonist is a "very nice place to be" for many of our female students. Hopefully, more and more Young Adult authors and publishing companies will heed the call for more titles that fill this void. katgonmom@gmail.com

The teacher's role in re-claiming a learning-focused classroom

By Lisa Thibodeaux, Electronic Communications Manager

A lot of the things we do every day in our schools are things that easily could have been 'otherwise.' This, according to author and activist Alfie Kohn, is the truth that should cause educators to ask important questions about what they do in their classrooms and schools and why they do it. In the NCTE 2013 conference roundtable session, "Claiming the Future of Literacy: De-Testing and De-Grading Our Classrooms," Kohn led the charge against the unquestioned practices that interfere with meaningful learning experiences for students.

"We often ask 'how much' homework is appropriate," Kohn says, "instead of asking if students should *have* to work a second shift when they get home from school." The key questions that Kohn finds worthy of consideration: Are tests necessary to gather information about how students are doing? And are grades the best means of reporting students' achievements to parents?

Before participants in this session broke into smaller round-table

discussion groups in order to consider these ideas, Kohn shared additional researched information about grading, teaching, and learning, such as:

- Teachers judged to be of highest quality are typically the ones who almost never give tests.
- Students who are graded tend to be less excited about the work they are doing.
- Rubrics often intensify the focus on the grading experience and can detract from the learning experience.

The subsequent roundtable discussions were led by grading experts and researchers across the country and were focused on the ways in which de-emphasizing grading could lead to stronger and richer literacy experiences in K-16 ELA classrooms. Discussion leaders included Maja Wilson, Joe Bower, Julie Gorlewski, Lawrence Baines, Jim Webber, and Renita Schmidt. lisa.thibodeaux@pisd.edu

Temple Grandin teaches across all spectrums

By Kay Shurtleff, President

One of the featured authors at NCTE this year was Dr. Temple Grandin, professor, inventor, speaker, and autistic woman. She spoke in an overcrowded room to a captivated crowd about her experiences as an autistic person. "I was bullied and teased in school," she said. "It was horrible. But I was lucky because I was born just after autism had a diagnosis." She went on to describe the ease with which she worked with horses and built model rockets as a child, saying, "Those were the only times I wasn't teased."

In her book *The Autistic Brain: Thinking Across the Spectrum*, Grandin describes the speech therapy she received as a pre-school child, as well as the work her mother did in order to help her not only compensate, but succeed. It is a general look at autism, including some of the science of autism and practical advice for educators and other stakeholders. One of her earlier books (she has written many), *Thinking in Pictures*, describes the way her own mind processes information in pictures rather than in language.

Grandin spoke energetically about some of the characteristics exhibited by those

on the autism spectrum. She urged the crowd to educate themselves about the *neuro-differences* of children with autism and cautioned about over using any identifying labels. She advocates teaching all adolescents work skills beginning at age 12, encouraging the study of humanities and arts, and teaching mechanical, "hands-on" skills in schools.

In her signature, no-nonsense, humorous way, Grandin offered ten basic tips for working with kids on the autism spectrum:

1. Limit the child's verbal repetition. Say to the child, "You can tell that story twice to the same person, and that's it."
2. Play board games. This is helpful in teaching about taking turns and for helping the child learn to wait for her turn.
3. Branch out. Grandin explained that many autistic children want to repeat an action (e.g., drawing a bird, singing the same song). Say, "Learn to do work that other people want." For example, encourage the child to draw—instead of a bird—a horse to illustrate a story that another student has written.

4. Give them advance notice. "Stretch them just outside their comfort zones, but don't spring it on them." Let them know that tomorrow they will be expected to do something new.
5. Build on strengths.
6. Limit video games. Video games encourage repetitive behavior and discourage the interaction with others that is vital to the development of an autistic child.
7. Give choices. The child will benefit from deciding between two similar activities, but doing nothing should never be one of the choices.
8. Explain humor. Use a specific example of satire (or other type of humor) and explicitly tell the child why it is funny.
9. Have high expectations. Determine "Is it behavior or is it biology?" Hold kids accountable for their actions.
10. Her final bit of advice? Follow Roy Rogers' rules for living: <http://www.cowboyway.com/RoyRogers.htm>. And it is clear that Grandin does.

View Temple Grandin's TED Talk here: http://www.ted.com/talks/temple_grandin_the_world_needs_all_kinds_of_minds.html
Kay.Shurtleff@Region10.org

What the heck is a #hackjam?

By Molly Adams, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

I am a faithful and obedient conference attendee. I commit to go, I attend the sessions I am supposed to attend, I take notes, I tweet out religiously while there, and I look for ways to share when I return home. This year at NCTE in Boston, the #hackjam hijacked my obedient, predictable conference routine.

Friend and fellow hackjammer, Kelly Mogk, told me later, “I really thought you weren’t going to do it. I could tell you were nervous about it.” And I was. When I was stopped by [Chad Sansing](#) and [Andrea Zellner](#) in a hallway near the exhibit hall, my first reaction was this: “Oh my goodness, these are people I follow on Twitter!!!! #awesomeness!!!!” They listed 4 parts of the #hackjam:

1. you go on a secret mission
2. you find free stuff
3. you remix a comic with aforementioned free stuff
4. you make a digital connection to what you made

My next thought was this: “You’ve got to be kidding me. I can’t do any of that.”

I am the worst kind of adventurer: I claim to be one on paper, some kind of crazy revolutionary in my writing and teaching, yet in the moment, I am quite the conformist. I do not like going up to people in sales and striking up conversations and asking for stuff. I do not feel confident to make anything cool. Oh yes, I think I remix my teaching, but really, when it comes down to it, I do not really know if I do. But these were Twitter heroes, real movers and shakers, and I could be a part of the movement. Maybe I could change. I hoped that Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher, whom I saw walking past me (I resisted urge to wave like a rabid fan) as I was listening to the #hackjam spiel, would actually have encouraged me to participate and forgiven me for missing their probably well over-crowded session. The #hackjam changed my entire conference experience.

So I grabbed my cell phone, and Kelly and I started running. Panting and sweating, we hit up exhibitor booths, looking for what #hackjammers called “schwag,” and even scoring some free signed books in the process (thank you, [Beth Kephart](#)!). With bags full, we scampered back breathlessly to our hallway stakeout, splaying our papers, brochures, stickers, and booklets into a massive communal pile. We set about our #hackjam business: remix a comic, they said. I hear “comic book,” so while others created posters or brochures, I somehow managed to create a remixed comic of Thor and his writing heroes, Donald Graves and Thomas Newkirk, called *Thor, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and His Friends of Liberty*. In 90 minutes. Twitter friend and new real friend [Paul Oh](#) responded, “That sounds kind of scary.” Kelly said, “You made an entire comic????”

Well, I guess I did. Was I following directions? Or not? Which was the right thing in this situation? Herein lies my dilemma – to conform or not, and in the not, to feel comfortable making new meaning.

This entire “unconference” idea behind the #hackjam is in line with both the new [Edcamp](#) (“we are self-directed learners”) and the “Make” or “[Make Learning Connected](#)” ([#clmooc](#)) movements that have acquired so many followers in the last couple of years, including me. Both promote learners taking an active role in their learning, feeling empowered to make something creative and allow learning to be organic rather than just taking traditional



Molly Adams' original remix, courtesy of Marvel's Limited Edition of Thor: Heaven and Earth

approaches. I found this experience wildly inspiring. I thought I had nothing to offer – I thought I could not make anything cool. I thought I did not really know how to remix, and here I was, making an entire story out of some free brochures that I could have just read and recycled. I recognized my own personal gurus through Thor’s graphically novelized story, and even made the comic book interactive. What comics encourage the reader to add to the story?

Yet, this is the story of my writing and professional life. I stand on the shoulders of Donald Graves and Thomas Newkirk myself, and Penny and Kelly, and Don Murray, and Natalie Goldberg. And my friends and mentors in TCTELA and the writing project who make me want to be a better teacher and learner. These are my friends of liberty. They liberate my mind and my heart and my pen.

When was the last time you missed a conference session to do that? Next year, at NCTE 2014 in Washington, D.C., keep your eyes open for the #hackjam and whoever might hijack your comfortable conference experience. Do not look for it in the program; you have to keep your eyes up and your attitude open to talking to Twitter heroes who just might change your life. Take the chance to make something, to hack into your own code and develop something new and exciting. You just might teach yourself something that just might change the climate of your classroom or the course of your journey as a learner. Teachers should still be learning, right? Is that not why we attend a conference in the first place?

To learn more about this year’s #hackjam, check out the feed on Twitter and via the feed at [#ncte13](#), or at [Andrea Zellner’s Storify](#) of the entire #hackjam experience. [#themovementcontinues](#). Read about Molly’s #hackjam experience on Twitter [@finchgirl10](#), and see Kelly’s too, [@kellylou](#). fridayswithfrogs@gmail.com