

TEXAS VOICES

A NEWSLETTER OF THE TEXAS COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

President's
Corner

The poolside makes the best place for work

By Kim Pinkerton, President

It is hard to believe that more than four months have passed since the 2016 TCTELA Conference & Exhibition. These past four months have afforded ample opportunity for TCTELA leadership to work hard for its members.

TCTELA leaders have continued to advocate for the presence of the voice of the literacy teacher and professional in the ELAR TEKS revision process. In an effort to develop a cohesive voice about the ELAR TEKS revisions, several TCTELA leaders met with advisors from other professional organizations across the state to review and analyze both the first and second drafts of revised ELAR TEKS. TCTELA analyzed and categorized your comments from the conference town hall meeting with Donna Bahorich and shared those with the SBOE. Additionally, TCTELA representatives testified on two occasions before the SBOE. In January, Victoria Young shared a report of the TCTELA TEKS Forum responses to the first drafts of the revised ELAR TEKS, and Valerie Taylor spoke to the SBOE about the recursive nature of language arts and the need to teach conventions in context. In April, I presented the SBOE with a report about how well the second drafts of revised ELAR TEKS addressed the TCTELA TEKS Forum responses. To see the two SBOE reports and the comments from the conference town hall meeting with Donna Bahorich, go to <http://www.tctela.org/links>.

TCTELA has attained sponsorship to support a second TCTELA TEKS Forum. This forum will provide TCTELA members, and others who are interested in participating in the ELAR TEKS revision process, with an opportunity to comment on the next drafts, which will be completed early in the summer. The target date for the launch of the next TCTELA TEKS Forum is late summer 2016.

Beyond the TEKS revisions process, Vice President Diane Miller worked with the TCTELA committee leaders to develop a vision for enhanced committee involvement with professional development across the state. The goal is to reach teachers who may not otherwise have ample opportunities for quality professional development and to assist with state efforts to provide equitable literacy education for all children in the state of Texas. Committee chairs will present plans to the TCTELA board members at the June meeting.

Finally, the speakers for the 2017 TCTELA Conference & Exhibition were finalized. Luncheon speakers will include Sharon Draper and Neal Shusterman. Penny Kittle and Shanna Peebles will speak during the general session times. And,

CONTENTS

President's Corner	1
Professional Development	2
State of the Profession	4
Summer Reads	6
Thoughts From the Field	9

Penny Kittle, Sharon Draper, Matt Glover, Jeff Wilhelm, John Schumacher, and Colby Sharp will conduct workshop sessions.

I am proud of the work that TCTELA has done over the past few months. Yet, I know that there is much more to do, even if summer is approaching. While I am trying to soak up some sun by the pool, I will also be working for TCTELA. I hope that you will do the same. So, grab some sunscreen, your coconut-flavored drink, and a nice chaise at poolside. But, do not forget to take your laptop so that you can write your proposal for the TCTELA conference (<http://www.tctela.org/2017-presentation-proposal-form-1/>) or review the information about the TEKS revision process. In addition, you can bring one of the books recommended in this issue of *Texas Voices*. Whatever you do to enjoy the summertime, remember to stay connected to TCTELA. We will definitely be working hard for you.

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From the blogosphere...

Join Jennifer Gonzalez in this community she has built just for Y-O-U!
<http://www.cultofpedagogy.com/>

...to the website

WE NEED Y-O-U! Pick a TCTELA committee & jump right in.
<http://www.tctela.org/committees/>

A new NCTE on the horizon

By Kelly E. Tummy, Vice President-elect, Membership and Affiliates



The National Council teachers of English (NCTE) met with a Houston-based focus group for some exciting changes coming to the website and the organization in the near future. Although numbers were small, the executive team consisting of Emily Kirkpatrick—Executive Director, Susan Houser—President-Elect, Jocelyn Chadwick—Vice-President, and a marketing team from *Brains on Fire* (@BrainsOnFire - Twitter handle) from Greenville, South Carolina, led participants through creative exercises to gauge reactions to the website and to drill down to some basic needs members would like to see from the organization in the future. Participants in the focus groups were shown a series of images then chose a single one that represented anything from teaching careers to opinions of NCTE and thoughts about the future influence of NCTE in teaching. Many in attendance shared some insight into ways the national organization could be of help to local affiliates.

Kirkpatrick's focus, as well as the presidential team's, is to help rebrand NCTE in the coming months. She came to NCTE after an incredibly successful tenure at *Wonderopolis*. The creative team in attendance was instrumental in launching the newest portion of that website called *The Wonderground*, where teachers of any discipline can submit lesson plans online using the *Wonderopolis Wonders of the Day*.

Houston was the first focus group conducted as it was the location of *The Conference on College Composition and Communication* for 2016. More focus groups will ensue throughout the summer, and members should see a new website and focus from the national organization, possibly even by fall of 2016. ktummy@hcdce-texas.org

Checking in with the committees

By Diane M. Miller, Ph.D., Vice-President for Membership & Affiliates

"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."

~ Henry Ford ~

The TCTELA committee chairs and their committee members have been gearing up to support the 2015 Texas State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators, which is Texas's answer to the federal government's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The goal of this state initiative is to ensure that all Texas public-school children have equitable access to outstanding, qualified teachers. More information about this state initiative may be found by clicking [here](#).

Earlier this spring, the TCTELA Executive Board charged the committee chairs with the task of developing relevant and creative ways to address our organization's possible role in this state initiative. Currently, the committees' chairs and members are brainstorming and planning how they could contribute to developing "excellent educators" across the state.

The chairs have been invited to the June board meeting in order to report the plans they have developed with their committee members. They have been asked to determine at least one idea or strategy for how TCTELA could contribute to this initiative to support teacher development in Texas. Ideas might include a speakers' bureau, a series of podcasts or videos, a mentoring network, or even a more formalized PD session.

Supporting this state initiative makes for compelling and meaningful committee work. For instance, Allie McCarron, Chair of the Adolescent Literacy Committee, reported that their "current plan is to start building a bank of resources related to both the mentoring of teachers and adolescent literacy. Once we have a good list started, our membership will have an article per month to read and discuss in three possible places: at our monthly online meetings, within a Twitter chat, or on a committee Facebook page. We're currently working on a survey to send out so we can start getting ideas about what articles to read."

continued on page 9

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Guiding student writers with *Write for Texas*

By Tomasina Burkhardt, Consultant, Region 10 ESC

Throughout the state, teachers are searching for good resources to use in order to improve student writing. There are exorbitant resources available, but Texas teachers want resources that support Texas students and the standards they have to address in writing.

To support this need, The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risks has developed resources that align with the very skills and concepts our students need in order to improve their writing. *Write for Texas* is a compilation of free research-based writing resources that highlight best practices in the area of writing. All of the resources are available online and include both printable handouts and videos to aid instructional practices. The printable resources include *Using Reading and Writing to Support Student Learning*, *Teaching the Elements of Personal Narrative Texts*, *Teaching the Elements of Expository and Persuasive Texts*, *Teaching Sentence Skills*, and *Teaching Revising and Editing Skills*. To accompany the printable resources, online videos are available as visual demonstrations to support and extend classroom learning.

Throughout the last couple of years, the resources have proved invaluable to many Texas classrooms. Teachers and students alike have benefitted from the *Write for Texas* resources in numerous ways by:

- providing a guided approach to writing;
- equipping teachers with professional development needed for writing instruction;
- demonstrating the thinking processes needed to organize thoughts for writing; and
- providing demonstration lesson for teachers to understand the value of think-alouds and the importance of the reading and writing connection.

The great thing about the *Write for Texas* resources is that teachers are able to use them in both traditional and non-traditional ways. Because the information in the resources is research-based, teachers are assured of the reliability and validity of the information which allows teachers to discover creative and student-friendly ways to use it in the classroom. Instructional coaches and teachers have shared a wealth of instructional practices for the use of the resources.

Videos have been used to:

- Facilitate team meetings and Professional Learning Communities
- Create learning stations in the classroom to support writing instruction

- Demonstrate model lessons for writing instruction

Online printable resources have been used as:

- self-paced professional development;
- a resource to guide curriculum and unit planning;
- a guided approach to writing instruction; and
- a resource to create classroom lessons, anchor charts, learning stations, and writer's workshop.

Be sure to check out the *Write for Texas* resources online at

www.writefortexas.org.

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Join *Teachers Write!* this summer

By Katrina Gonzales, Executive Secretary

The summer of 2016 offers teachers the fifth opportunity to participate in *Teachers Write!*, an endeavor supported by children's author and former teacher, Kate Messner, and her merry band of writerly friends.

Beginning June 27th through August 5th, teachers from around the globe will write and confer with the masters of the writing craft. Each day of the week, guest authors will nudge participants into writers, much as teachers do during the school year for their students.

Last year, the summer of 2015, I participated in *Teachers Write!* My novel continues to be a work in progress, but, without the camaraderie and collegiality this group provided, my novel would certainly remain a thought and not a solid start to a draft.

To sign up, click on this link: <http://www.katemessner.com/teachers-write/>

Teachers Write! costs nothing but time; time to write that ELA teachers usually cannot find during the school year. The three main coordinating authors, Kate Messner, Gae Polishner, and Jo Knowles, encourage, but not require, participants to purchase each of their latest titles (three books) as several of the exercises will refer to these books.

I hope to see many of you in cyberspace this summer, working away at your next writing piece with *Teachers Write!*

katgonmom@gmail.com



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TCTELA - Texas Council
of Teachers of English
Language Arts

State Board of Education runoff elections

By Tracy Kriese, SLATE/NCTE Liaison

On May 24, two education districts in Texas will have runoff elections for places on the State Board of Education. In District 9, Mary Lou Bruner and Keven Ellis are competing for the Republican nomination. The winner of the runoff will be on the ballot this November with Amanda Rudolph, a Sam Houston State University professor of secondary education. In District 6, Jasmine Jenkins and Dakota Carter are competing for the Democratic nomination. The winner of that runoff will meet Donna Bahorich, the current chair of the SBOE, in November's election.

Mary Lou Bruner (mlb4sboe.com) has thirty-six years of experience in Texas public schools working as a teacher, counselor, and educational diagnostician. Bruner advocates for more conservative curriculum standards and a return to traditional education, including a phonics approach to reading and the teaching of handwriting in the early elementary years. Asked about challenges facing education today, Bruner expressed concern over the encroachment of Common Core curriculum standards into Texas schools and the need for more parent and teacher input at the local level, stating, "I think Texas people need to represent Texas values. We don't need the federal government to tell us what to do in Texas."

Keven Ellis (ellisfortexas.com) is a longtime resident of Lufkin. This chiropractor, business owner, and local school board president has served in many leadership positions in the Lufkin community. He vows to stand for conservative values in education and to advocate for district local control of education decisions. Among the issues listed on his website are a commitment to helping Texas lead in the development of 21st century education and a caution against a culture of testing: "Teachers in the state of Texas chose

this profession for the love of teaching, not for the love of testing. If we will let teachers do what they know how to do best, our children will be successful."

Jasmine Jenkins (jasmineljenkins.com) is a former fourth-grade teacher from Alief ISD. Jenkins has a doctorate in education and is currently the manager of Houston-based Advantage Testing, a tutoring and test preparation company. Among the issues Jenkins identifies as key to this race is a need for students to have textbooks that are free from inaccurate information and questionable omissions of fact. In addressing post-secondary student readiness, Jenkins places a priority on vocational education as well as college and career preparation. Jenkins feels it is important for the SBOE to hear from those whose lives are impacted by policy, suggesting that panels of students, parents, and teachers meet regularly with the SBOE to share their insights.

Dakota Carter (dakotafortx.com) is a child and adolescent psychiatry resident at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston and is currently pursuing his doctorate in education. As an undergraduate at the University of North Texas, Carter served as student body president and worked as a tutor and mentor for high school and college students. High-stakes testing, biased textbooks, and developmentally inappropriate curriculum standards are some of the issues he is concerned about. Carter would make it a priority to address the needs of vulnerable school populations, advocating for improvements in anti-bullying curriculum and better resources for ESL, G/T, and special needs students.

Voters are encouraged to visit candidate websites and to read the many news articles and interviews covering these races.
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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Review the submission guidelines at <http://www.tctela.org/english-in-texas>

Publication: English in Texas Volume 46.2 (FALL/WINTER)

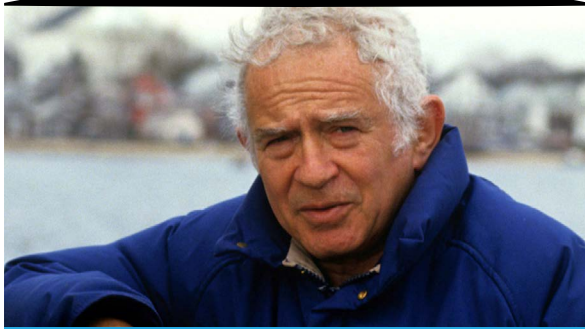
Theme: Transnationalism and Literacy Across Borders

Call for Submissions Deadline: September 1, 2016) / Column Deadline: October 1, 2016

Call for Professional Submissions: A frequent topic of debate at the state and federal level is related to immigration, with regular calls for deportation of immigrants who may not have legal United States citizen status. This has an impact on families of students who may have fled their home countries to the United States to escape situations that were less than ideal—including situations of living in conflict zones, drug cartels, and gang-related violence. Increasingly, these students end up in the public school system, with little to no support from the outside, and little contact with their home country.

However, the amount of students who are arriving daily from these experiences provides teachers an opportunity to reach out to these students, and to validate the literacy practices of their home cultures, thus bridging literacies across national and geopolitical borders. The content area of English language arts is one that promotes empathy, understanding, and recognition of cultural values. As Texas is a border state, with many students arriving daily in local classrooms with little to no hope of returning to their home countries, how can teachers ensure that students have the opportunity to explore their home cultures and literacies, while still meeting the requirements set for by state standards? How can teachers enhance literacy learning opportunities for students who may have witnessed atrocious crimes while living in conflict zones?

To provide students with opportunities to explore their home cultures and literacies, teachers must be able to consider points of view beyond their own beliefs. Teachers must be able to provide students with a cross-cultural experience, using literature and various texts—be they multimodal or traditional—that reflect complexity in terms of economic, social, political, aesthetic, moral, historical, and geographical contexts of a cultural group (Short, 2009). How can teachers explore their own cultural identities and develop conceptual understandings of students' cultures? How can teachers develop an awareness and respect for different cultural perspectives as well as the commonality of human experience?



THE NORMAN MAILER WRITING AWARD FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

WIN \$5,000 cash
prize at a special
award ceremony!

Entry Deadline

July 15th, Noon CST.

No late entries will be accepted.

Enter Online

<http://www.ncte.org/awards/nmwa>

The Norman Mailer Center and the National Council of Teachers of English are pleased to invite submissions for the 2016 Norman Mailer Writing Award for Middle and High School Teachers. Full- and part-time middle school and high school teachers are eligible to enter the competition.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Full- and part-time middle and high school teachers are eligible to enter the competition.
- Entries will be accepted online and may include one piece of writing with a maximum of 20 single-spaced pages.
- The competition is limited to works of non-fiction.
- Entries are accepted online only through July 15, 2016.
- The writing you upload must include a title, your name, and page numbers within your file. Use a plain, common, and easily readable font, such as Times New Roman, 11- or 12-point. Accepted file types: .pdf, .doc, .docx, and .txt (maximum file size: 8 megabytes).

THE PRIZE

The winner will receive a \$5,000 cash prize at a special award ceremony.

JUDGING CRITERIA

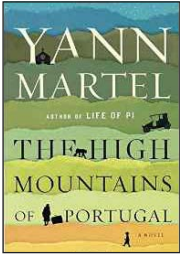
Late entries can not be considered. Submissions will be read by national panels of teachers and writers. They will be judged by how well they achieve several qualities, including the artful treatment of subject matter; originality; quality of insight, image, voice, and style; artful arrangement of elements and materials; and overall aesthetic, emotional or intellectual effect.

Authors retain copyright of their work.

Summer Reads

The High Mountains of Portugal: Another incredible journey with Yann Martel

By Kay Shurtleff, Electronic Communications Manager



If Willa Cather, Stephen King, and J.K. Rowling were to collaborate on a novel about grief and loss, it would be *The High Mountains of Portugal*. Rather than taking his readers on one long journey, as he did in the wildly successful *Life of Pi*, he takes them on three oddly connected journeys.

In the first, young curator Tomas searches for an unusual crucifix about which he has read in an old journal he has found. Driving an early automobile forced upon him by his rich uncle, he goes on a long, descriptive (think Willa Cather) trip to the high mountains of Portugal. He encounters problem after problem which Martel chronicles with moments of unexpected humor (think J.K. Rowling). All the while, he grieves for his lover, his child, and his father.

In the second journey, readers travel through a bizarre encounter between a pathologist who performs autopsies and widow who

wants to participate in her late husband's autopsy. The unthinkable events in this section are described in such detail (think Stephen King) that the reader almost believes they happened. To say anymore would give away too much, but I will never see a black dress without thinking of this book.

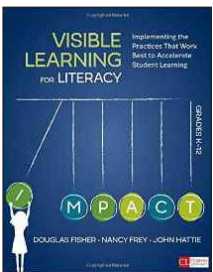
For the final journey, the reader begins in Canada and travels with a senator and his friend who happens to be a chimpanzee. Their destination—you guessed it—is the high mountains of Portugal. They lead a life that is happy, if peculiar, despite the protests of his sister and son.

This is not a novel for the faint of heart. It explores religion, story, love, and grief with a splash of Agatha Christie thrown in for good measure. And the next time Yann Martel sets out on the trail (and I hope he does), I am going along for the ride.

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***Visible Learning for Literacy* helps focus teachers on what works**

By Cindy Bengé, Past President



As teachers, it is sometimes difficult for us to know exactly what it is that we do that works in increasing student achievement and what it is that we do that does not work. Our teacher barometer includes assessments such as individual reading and writing assessments, classroom tests, district benchmarks, and state assessments. Sometimes it includes anecdotal evidence or even just our perception of how engaged students are during a lesson or activity.

In their new book *Visible Learning for Literacy*, Nancy Frey, Doug Fisher, and John Hattie help teachers understand how much their instruction can impact their students' achievement by providing readers with empirical evidence of what has worked repeatedly within the body of research on instruction. Additionally, through the use of effect sizes, the authors provide a way for teachers to go beyond their perceptions and determine just how much growth actually takes place in their classroom and whether their instruction falls within what they call the "Zone of Desired Effects," the area of desired growth.

In "laying the groundwork" for visible literacy instruction, Fisher et al. provide essential tools for creating an environment conducive

for learning in addition to instructional practices specific to literacy. Within their model of literacy instruction are challenge, self-efficacy, and learning intentions with success criteria. Within these three constructs, the authors nested other research-supported practices intended to support literacy instruction framed from the perspective of surface learning, deep learning, and learning for transfer.

Although there are no new and ground-breaking practices within this book, the authors do a beautiful job of framing literacy instructional practices that are supported by John Hattie's findings from his comprehensive review of over 800 meta-analyses of educational practices from all over the world. Given the time constraints of instruction and the number of students who begin each year with literacy deficits, teachers can no longer rely on one measure to determine their student growth but, in addition to guidance provided from the research, must utilize data in such a way that they can determine the effectiveness of their teaching. Teachers must be purposeful in the instruction they choose as well as how they deliver instruction so that they can expect the most student achievement from their time. This book can help.

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Summer Reads

Sharon Draper's *Stella* shines brightly

By Kim Pinkerton, President



Sharon Draper's most recent book, *Stella by Starlight*, is a masterful work of historical fiction that is perfect for tween readers. The winner of the 2016 Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction for Children and the 2015 Kirkus Best Middle Grades Fiction and New York Times Notable Children's Books awards, *Stella by Starlight* unites Draper's entrancing prose with the story of one family's struggle against poverty and injustice.

Set in the 1930s in the fictional town of Bumblebee, North Carolina, the story begins when the protagonist, Stella, witnesses a secret, late-night Ku Klux Klan cross burning. The flames on the cross that night symbolize more than fearmongering for the African American families in Bumblebee; they symbolize the fire flaring in the souls of an African American community that is ready to be seen as more than just freed slaves.

The active presence of the clan brings the community together, and when Stella's father and two other men register to vote, the community finds out just how far the Klan members are willing to go to ensure that no African American is allowed to move ahead. As she struggles to make sense of what these frighteningly evil acts mean for her town, African Americans, and her family, Stella is awed by the bravery of some of the men in her community and even learns that she can be very courageous too.

There is so much about *Stella by Starlight* that is just wonderful. The love shared in Stella's family is heartwarming. The struggles

Stella endures at school, especially with writing, are relatable. In addition, the historical elements of the story are captivating. Readers will want to know more about segregation and poverty in North Carolina in the 1930s, and they will certainly be inspired to learn more about what it would have been like to be Stella during that time period.

Written after Draper was given her grandmother's diary, *Stella by Starlight* is inspired by Draper's grandmother's stories, as well as Draper's many experiences listening to the storytellers of Union Hills, North Carolina. Draper's personal connection to the setting and the history are evidenced in her narrative. The book is a marvelous work of children's literature, reminiscent of the beauty of Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

Stella by Starlight is a must for upper elementary and early middle level teachers and students. Actually, it is a great read for anyone who loves uplifting stories and learning from history. Sharon Draper said it best when she said, "From books of historical fiction, we can learn something that can help us in the present" (Draper, 2016, 1:30). Don't we all need this type of inspiring help in the present? Take some time to read this touching work, and then plan to visit with Sharon Draper about it at the 2017 TCTELA Annual Conference & Exhibition in January.

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References

Draper, S. (2016). Sharon Draper on *Stella by Starlight* [video]. In Sharon Draper. com: Intro., Summary, & General Questions. Retrieved from <http://sharondraper.com/bookdetail.asp?id=74>



Join the TEKS ELAR/SLAR conversation in the TCTELA TEKS Forum.

For more information visit <http://www.tctela.org/about-community>.



Share your knowledge and expertise with your colleagues at the next TCTELA Annual Conference in January 2017.

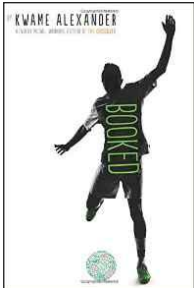
Proposals are now being accepted through September 16.

For the online form visit <http://www.tctela.org/2017-presentation-proposal-form-1/>.

Summer Reads

Some summer reading recommendations

By Margaret Hale, President-Elect



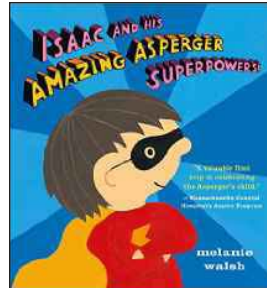
Booked by Kwame Alexander

Just like Alexander's previous novel in verse (a Newbery winner, by the way), *The Crossover*, his latest title is sure to be a hit with adolescent readers. His latest novel in verse follows main character Nick Hall, who is a star of his school's soccer team. Problems arise when Nick gets injured and is sidelined from the soccer field for a bit.

Nick's word-nerd father sees this break from soccer as the perfect time to try to get his reluctant-reader son to become more interested in reading. At the same time, Nick's mother leaves home for a bit to work at a job she loves in another state, plus he and his best friend run into some problems with their friendship.

What else can Nick possibly deal with? Well to top all of that off, he has a bully who is picking on him, and he also is interested in a girl for the first time. Wow! That is a lot to handle for anyone, much less a teenager!

Alexander tells Nick's story using a variety of poetry styles, including free verse, haiku, and acrostics. Additionally, he makes lots of references to other books (a great way to get your own readers interested in other books) like *How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba Sized Trophy* by Crystal Allen, *Rhyme Schemer* by K.A. Holt, *All the Broken Pieces* by Ann E. Burg, *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse, and many others! Librarians will fall in love with Nick's librarian, Mr. MacDonald, who is persistent in working to make the perfect book match for Nick. Read this one – you will be glad you did!



Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers! by Melanie Walsh

What a fantastic picture book this is! For anyone looking to help children (or adults) understand people with Asperger's, this book is a wonderful introduction. The main character, Isaac, introduces himself right off the bat and lets the reader know that he is

a superhero. His superhero powers "make him slightly different from his brother and the other kids at school." Unfortunately, kids at school do not always understand, and they pick on him because he is different.

Isaac explains that one of his superhero powers is being able to remember all kinds of things, and he enjoys sharing those things with kids at school. Unfortunately, some kids are not interested in those things. Another superhero power is an abundance of energy. His teacher does not always understand how Isaac likes to expend that energy, though. Being a superhero means Isaac's brain is always busy thinking and remembering many different things, and sometimes that causes him to forget to be friendly to other kids. He is not trying to be rude, he is just using his superpowers.

I shared this picture book with a friend whose son has Asperger's to see what he thought of it. When she returned it, she said her son said he liked it because he has the same superhero powers as Isaac. Definitely validation for the value of this story! Kids with Asperger's will see themselves in Isaac, and kids with friends who have Asperger's might understand those friends a little bit better.

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2016 TCTELA Conference

Schedule and Handouts available at:
www.tctela.org/conference-archives/



2017 TCTELA Conference

<http://www.tctela.org/2017-conference/>

SAVE THE DATE

2016 NCTE Annual Convention

Faces of Advocacy

Location: Atlanta Georgia

Dates: November 17-20, 2016

Workshops: November 17, 20-22

Learn more: <http://www.ncte.org/annual>



Growing up with the writing process

By Melinda Miller, Co-Editor, *English in Texas*

As a first-grader, I was a prolific writer. I wrote many volumes of *The Book of My Cats*, each in a composition book provided by my English professor father. At first, I wrote directly in the book and illustrated my story; but eventually, I wrote on notebook paper and then transferred my writing to the composition book when I was satisfied with my work. My sister, a second-grader, thought I had a pretty good idea going, so she started her own series of stories—about cats as well. We shared our stories with each other and made suggestions. My sister even helped me spell words I did not know and would sometimes tell me that one sentence needed to be moved so the story would make more sense. At night, I told her stories that I usually ended up incorporating into my book the next day.

It had to be done after school, though. My teacher required that everything we wrote was correct. Our stories were done on lined paper that had a space for a picture at the top. We were given a topic and told to write a story, then illustrate it. Everything had to be spelled correctly, and capitals and punctuation had to be in the correct places. If we made a mistake, we could erase, but we could not have another sheet of paper. We had so much erasing on our paper, our paper often tore, and then we cried. If we cried, we got to sit in our teacher's lap, but we still could not have another sheet

of paper. I quickly learned to write only words I knew how to spell. My stories were quite limited. We did not write multiple drafts, only one. So we did not grow as writers, and we were not very excited about writing at school. I did most of my writing at home.

What my sister and I did not realize at the time was that we were participating in the writing process. The nighttime stories were our pre-writing. We drafted on notebook paper, had peer conferences, then revised and edited. When we wrote our final story into our composition books, we read them to each other, then scurried off to be the first one to read to our parents. When our grandparents visited, our books were the first things we showed them. I became a writer by the writing I did at home—using invented spelling and making approximations, as I created my masterpieces. It was so natural and so organic. It was real writing.

When teachers expect perfect writing, they stifle students' creativity. Young writers need to experiment with text. They learn and grow from their approximations, from continued exposure to print, and from much reading and writing. Just as my sister and I did, children experience joy when they choose what they will write about, put their ideas down on paper, and shape their words into an incredible book that is all their own. mmiller@shsu.edu

Checking in with the committees

continued from page 2

Another committee that is already hard at work is the Special Needs Learner Committee. Chair Sylvia Troxell noted that her group recommends forming “a network of support.” Sylvia explained, “Special education teachers are often required to teach multiple grade levels and multiple subjects in the isolation of the classroom walls where developing day-to-day activities often overtakes thoughtful planning. Perhaps the first focus of the network would be to provide support, ideas, and strategies to balance reading skills instruction with our goal to create thoughtful, joyful, engaged and proficient readers who are exposed to excellent texts.” This committee is also exploring ways in which teachers could conveniently share resources within our membership, as “special education teachers are developing supplemental aids and re-inventing the wheel each school year.”

Have you joined the TCTELA committee that best matches your interests? If not, please contact the chair of the committee that sparks your enthusiasm for serving our profession.

- Adolescent Literacy: Allie McCarron, agoldblatt@harmonytx.org or megateacher12@gmail.com
- Legislative Action: Angie Kissire, angie.kissire@sonoraisd.net
- State of the Profession: Jessica Riley, jriley3@houstonisd.org

- Special Needs Learner: Sylvia Troxell, stroxell@eanesisd.net
- Early Childhood: Karin Perry, kperry@shsu.edu
- Multicultural Awareness, Deanna Watkins, Deanna.watkins@esc15.net
- Bilingual English and Second Language Awareness, Maureen Ucles, Maureen.ucles@springbranchisd.com
- Technology: Donalyn Miller, thebookwhisperer@gmail.com, Donna Brown, dbrown@ccisd.net
- Pre-Service Teacher (ad hoc): Janise McIntyre, christina.mcintyre@mwsu.edu (Note: the Pre-Service Teacher Committee works to recruit, administer, and facilitate the TCTELA Pre-Service Teacher Conference Grant each year. Please contact Janise for more information about nominating a pre-service teacher for this opportunity.)
- Conference (Local Arrangements): Allie McCarron, agoldblatt@harmonytx.org or megateacher12@gmail.com (Note: the Conference Committee is led by the Local Arrangements Chair. The 2017 TCTELA Annual Conference will be held in Fort Worth. Please contact Allie if you live in the area and would like to assist with the conference.)

In the past, we have often *come together* as committee members. Often we *stayed* in the committees, signing up year after year. In 2016, let's *work together* to achieve “success” for Texas's ELAR teachers. Contact a committee chair today, and do your part to participate and grow with TCTELA! petersond@uhd.edu

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Alamo Heights High School, 6900 Broadway St., San Antonio, TX 78209

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Student Editors: Anne Daubert, Mary Louise Randolph

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Student Editors: Jacob Garza, Jenny Elizalde-Cruz, Alyssa Garza, Sarah Cirildo, Lucero Trevino

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Jackson Middle School, 4538 Vance Jackson Rd., San Antonio, TX 78230

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Student Editor: Monserrat Luna, Heidi Reichling

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Plano East Senior High, 3000 Los Rios Blvd., Plano, TX 75074

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Tufkin High School, 309 S. Medford Dr., Lufkin, TX 75901

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Faculty Advisor: Christine Harrington

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Winston Churchill High School, 12049 Blanco Rd., San Antonio, TX 78216

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