

# TEXAS VOICES



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

## President’s corner: How are you moving “Beyond Boots, Borders, and Books?”

By Kelly E. Tummy, TCTELA President

As we begin 2019, I wanted to take a brief moment to reflect on how I got here in TCTELA, embarking upon a year of serving as your President. Twenty-eight years ago, I was a brand-new teacher in Galena Park ISD, and my department chair suggested to all the new teachers that we join TCTE (now TCTELA), as it was an organization that would be there to support us throughout our careers. She was right on every account. After attending several TCTELA conferences, I asked a colleague, “I wonder if I could ever be president of that organization? Would I have the know-how to do it? Will I ever be that good of a teacher?” She encouraged me and said the leaders were just like you and me—willing to give a part of themselves back to an organization. That stuck with me throughout most of my career; that is what teaching is—deep down, teaching is an act of service to others.

I tell you that story to say this—we all have something to give. We all have a place in TCTELA; it may be leadership, it may be section involvement, it may be conference attendance year after year. But whatever your role in TCTELA is, do what my department chair did all those years ago—bring others in and show them what an incredible state affiliate of NCTE looks like and how it continues to serve the ELAR professionals of Texas.

Even though Ellen Harrison was president then and led some incredible in-services I attended, she was a teacher like you and like me. She was serving others each day and finding her place in the language arts world of Texas. She happened to use TCTELA as her vehicle. I hope many of you find the home that I found almost three decades ago.

TCTELA has changed over time! Our name has changed, our leadership has changed, and yes, even our logos have changed. But the most exciting change over the years has been the way that our annual conference changes to fit the needs of our teachers and our state. At our 2019 annual conference, Dr. Diane Miller challenged the TCTELA community to move beyond boots, borders, and books. She crafted a weekend for us that allowed us to address the marginalized voices in our classrooms and to listen to and help raise up the underrepresented voices in the language arts narrative. Dr. Miller planned a conference that not only moved us beyond the borders of presenters and topics, but also showcased Texas in such a way that we left the conference feeling a part of a culture that was now more representative, more inclusive.

We started our Friday with Chad Everett, Steven Alvarez, and Frank Serafini—all challenging us to build capacity in learners, all the learners, sitting in front of us each day. They challenged

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us to learn their narratives, speak their learning language, and make the best decisions for our students.

Carole Boston Weatherford introduced many attendees to unheard voices like Fannie Lou Hamer and Gordon Parks through her inspiring book talks. And Jason Reynolds and Jimmy Santiago Baca made us see, really see, beyond borders of our classrooms to notice real children, to notice what they bring to our classrooms, and to value each and every narrative. Those two speakers were the lyrics and the music accompanying an incredible weekend on the San Antonio Riverwalk that still resonates with many of us.

I hope, for those who were in attendance, that the resonant sounds of the weekend and the challenges issued are fresh in your minds; they are in mine. For those who watched virtually on Twitter and Facebook, please heed the call to move beyond boots, borders, and books, and see the many faces of literacy across this incredible state. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you in this capacity.

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## The affirming power of conference attendance

By Roni Burren, Vice-President Elect

I often wondered if I was a strange English teacher. I was passionate about concepts that I wasn't sure other English teachers were passionate about. I asked my students to do tasks, read texts, and think outside of what they were used to. Although I saw my students growing and becoming more independent thinkers, I still wondered if I was doing something strange. That wondering led me on a quest; a quest to find other English teachers like me. It wasn't that they weren't on my campus. They were, but was it just us?

The first time I walked into a TCTELA conference I committed to finding out how strange or not strange I was. I looked for sessions that would help me grow in my current praxis and challenge me to take new risks in my classroom. I found those sessions to be plentiful. In nearly every session there was a turn-and-talk or a share out for teachers to explain their thinking. It was then that I found them—the other strangers.

At conferences, teachers, whether they are attendees or presenters, share how they teach and often why they teach. This sharing has the power to affirm all of us. It's easy to feel siloed in our profession. We face pressure at the federal, state and local levels. Before we start our school day, we are often pulled in many directions. Even with all of that, we stand before students and we challenge them to think for themselves, write for themselves, and read for themselves. What's more, we are often unsure if our students are getting it, and if we are the only ones.

Attending conferences may be the single most affirming experience a teacher can have. In the presence of other English teachers I was able to see myself. I learned how many "others" there were. Women, men, and non-binary people of all races from all over the state affirmed what I was doing in my current praxis. At TCTELA, I heard questions, was exposed to new texts, and asked to be a better teacher of children. While I felt I had been doing these things, conference attendance helped me see that I could teach better and that other teachers were in the proverbial boat with me.

From my first TCTELA conference in 2016 to the 2018 conference, and beyond, I encourage teachers to do what they can to attend. The affirming power of like-minded ELAR professionals has the power to not only provide professional growth but also the necessary strength to endure in the profession we love so dearly.

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## 2019 TCTELA Literacy Education Day planned for March 27

By Tracy Kriese, NCTE Liaison

Join TCTELA in Austin, Texas on Wednesday, March 27 for our biennial Literacy Education Day, when teams of TCTELA members and guests will visit the offices of Texas senators and representatives to advocate for the literacy education needs of students and teachers in our state.

As with the 2017 Texas legislative session, bills have been introduced regarding student assessment, full-day pre-kindergarten, graduation committees, and more issues that intersect with TCTELA's mission and core values. Teachers are the experts in education, and our legislators want to hear from us as they consider the bills before them. Our professional testimony will help empower our lawmakers to take action on the education issues they face this session. TCTELA members unable to make the trip to Austin on March 27 can still participate in Literacy Education Day. Those who wish to contact their state legislators from home will be sent a packet of materials that will support engaged, informed communication on issues and legislation important to Texas ELAR educators. For more information, complete the interest survey at <http://bit.ly/2019LitEdDay>.

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## New ELAR TEKS resource page created by TEA

By Tracy Kriese, NCTE Liaison

In preparation for the implementation of the revised ELAR/SLAR TEKS, the Texas Education Agency has created a new webpage for educators and parents. *Resources for the Revised English and Spanish Language Arts and Reading TEKS* includes already published TEKS documents and will expand in the coming year to include additional supporting materials.

Side-by-side documents provide a look at the current TEKS, adopted in 2009, and the recently revised TEKS, adopted in 2017, and set to be implemented in school year 2019-20 for grades K-8 and school year 2020-21 for English I-IV. These side-by-side documents include a column noting specific changes to certain Student Expectations (SEs) and implications for instruction. Vertical alignment documents are also available on this resource page.

Comprehensive TEKS guides for ELAR and SLAR grades K-8 will be posted to the Texas Gateway by June 2019. At the January 29 meeting of the State Board of Education, Commissioner Mike Morath shared an advance look at what these digital guides will offer educators and parents. For each SE at each grade level, users will find alignment information that is cross-curricular as well as vertical, with suggested activities for teaching each SE in a variety of subject areas, not just English Language Arts, and with suggestions for differentiated instruction. Each SE will also have correlating sample assessment items, including both

objective questions and performance-based tasks. Eventually, the guides will include samples of authentic student work demonstrating what varied levels of achievement look like for each SE. A glossary of terms will also be included for each grade level guide.

Additional information about the revised ELAR TEKS implementation and resources, STAAR data trends, and student assessment can be found in the presentation shared by TEA representatives at the 2019 TCTELA Annual Conference in San Antonio. That presentation is available for download on the TCTELA conference app. To access the TEA handout, refresh the app's homepage, then navigate to the Friday session titled TEA English Language Arts and Reading Update.

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## PD2Teach discussions: The author's purpose and craft strand

By Shona Rose, Region 16

*What follows is an edited transcript from PD2Teach discussions about the Author's Purpose and Craft Strand of the new ELAR standards for Texas, filmed at Paetow High School, summer of 2018. This strand emerges as the potential heart and center of the interconnectedness of the strands and the weaving of reading, writing, and thinking. Here's a peek at what the group discussed. You can see the videos and more resources like this at [www.bulbapp.com/pd2teach](http://www.bulbapp.com/pd2teach).*

Kelly: Welcome to PD2Teach. We are at our next filming to discuss Author's Purpose and Craft. We'll hold a collegial conversation about how to best equip teachers and to address training on these new standards. So, let's start with the knowledge and skills statement for Author's Purpose and Craft. The Author's Purpose and Craft Knowledge and skills statement asks us to use critical inquiry to analyze author's choices.

Here's where we start breaking apart the knowledge and skills statement: students have to analyze how the author's choices influence and communicate the meaning of a text. It goes on to reference how students analyze author's craft and how they apply author's craft purposefully. Why? To develop products and performances.

That's a lot that's happening in a knowledge and skills statement. Let's grow this up the vertical team and talk about just what the knowledge and skills statement means. What does the knowledge and skills statement mean in the lower grades?

Laura: As we are looking at the lower grades delving into that critical inquiry and analysis of the author's craft, we are really taking a look at "What did the author do *on purpose*?" The students need to understand that for everything that the author does, there is intention behind it. Text features are used intentionally. Font that is used intentionally - white space, illustrations. This standard focuses on how we help students to notice those things on their own. Our work becomes about encouraging students to slow down and look a little bit more carefully at any kind of text - whether it be a print, digital, or visual text.

Xandrea: It's also very important that we are mindful of the questions that we are using to guide that thinking. I think of our Kindergarten through fourth grade students. We help them think about texts and look at the organization. As educators, we facilitate that thinking with questions. How did the author organize that? Why did they choose that pattern? What was their choice? What do you think they were thinking when they wrote that? Then we help put students in that role of author and extend that thinking: If you were going to keep writing this book, what would you do? This helps the kids become more curious and interactive with the text. We are not just reading a text, we are analyzing a text: understanding what the author is saying, why they said it, and how they said it.

Kelly: So the other part of this knowledge and skills statement is that they analyze and apply this craft to their own

*Continued on next page*

## PD2Teach discussions: The author's purpose and craft strand (continued)

products and performances. How is that different from the current standards?

Laura: The knowledge and skills statement ties directly to the Composition and Response strands. The kids are taking these things that they are noticing, observing, and analyzing and applying them in things that *they* write and create. I like that the standard even references performances. I know that one of the things we work on in the primary grades is retelling. How can the students use some of that author's craft and the purpose *behind* it to create a purposeful retelling? They can incorporate some of those things that an author uses such as repetition to impact the audience. They then have a purpose behind what they are performing and producing as well.

Shona: It changes from our previous TEKS. We looked at a text and asked, "What does this mean?" We did have a few questions on assessments that asked us to examine why an author did something a certain way, but I think that's what we are moving more *towards*. When a kid reads a text, he/she is becoming aware of the purposeful decisions of the writer. Earlier, Lara was talking about *Follow the Moon Home*. There are some features in that text that the author crafted on purpose that are helpful to notice. We begin with our questions: instead of telling them what the features are, we let them notice what those features are, and begin that analysis from a point of "I need to know that." It's a cool thing when the child realizes that the author made those moves purposefully. Students begin viewing a text in a way that honors the whole point of the standards: meaning - "influence and communicate meaning." They realize that the author was doing something on purpose *to* them as readers. The author obviously wanted to do something to the reader with their words. The author wanted to influence their thinking, feeling, or knowing in some way. That's kind of neat to have students look at texts that way, but these new standards go much deeper than that. How do I then, use that text to say, "You know, I need to say something too. There's something that I'm curious about, that I'm wondering about. That I want to write about too. How can I write like Cousteau? How can I make choices about text structure, about font size, about blending a story with the back matter that gives some background? I can do that too."

Laura: Since you got us started on this little book, I want to show you guys the backmatter of this text. In these literary nonfiction pieces, a lot of authors will put in the research they did behind the story they told. In the past, we've done so many

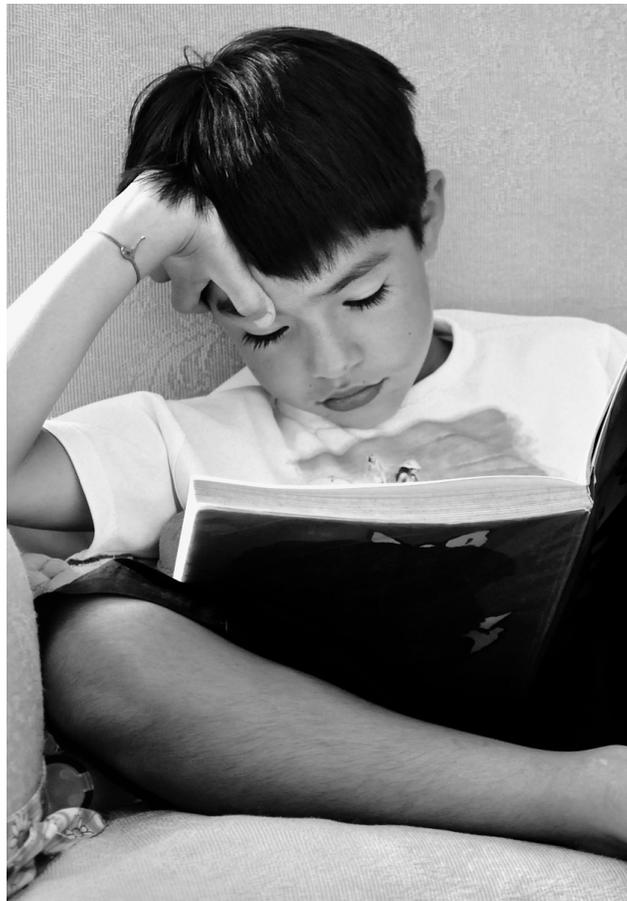
read alouds that are so separate and segregated from any other learning that the students are doing. Instead, we could tie this text to another book and get them curious about another topic. It fosters a journey down a curiosity road. One of the things I love on the back matter is that students can tie this straight in to those Inquiry and Research strands. After reading the book, students can say, "I'm curious about Loggerhead sea turtles. Now where can I go?" The backmatter says, "Internet Resources and Links." The author gives a place to look for those students who want to know more. It takes away that isolated research that we've always

done in the past - at least we have in my district. Instead, we let kids understand that curiosity, research, and inquiry happen all the time. All the time while we are reading. All the time while we are writing. Imagine if a student had read this and we pointed out this back matter. What if we looked and noticed the things the author did? If the students are writing an "all about" book, why couldn't they put in their own back matter and put in some of those resources? That's a really great way of taking what they have analyzed and noticed so they can apply it to their own writing.

Johnathan: You just talked about the kids trying to find what they wanted to say. I don't know if you've talked with a sophomore lately, but sophomores have lots that they want to say. However, they don't always feel like they have the means to say it. That's what I love about this strand: our work is about empowerment. It's about finding a way to help students find their voice - especially in the times we are in right now. Especially when you are talking about student

selected texts. You may have kids coming in choosing anything they want to read. That choice is about finding that meaningful mentor text, something they can grab onto, something they identify with, something that they can take something away from to use. They can look at the text and say, "This is something I can pattern myself after. This is something I see myself in." I'm so excited about this strand, you all have no idea! I just heard about textual lineages. I'd never heard about that word before, but how important it is to help students find those pieces that they will gravitate to, that they love, and that they recognize and identify with! That's going to be a real help in engaging our high school students all the way down to kinder.

Jon: What I heard from Shona, and you Johnathan as well, is a focus on the part of this strand where it says: develop his or her own product - that's beautiful. A student can select a piece that they enjoy. In the past, it was "You read this." You might take



## PD2Teach discussions: The author's purpose and craft strand (continued)

an AR test. You might do a book report. You throw it away; you are done with it. I think this strand is beautiful. What it does is challenge a student who would never *want* to write or *think* about writing. To decode what an author has written and talk deeply about why they did the work that way...once they figure out that formula, they can set themselves up with their own scenario to see if they can create that same situation in what they are writing. And it's a challenge they will enjoy. The first time you try this, it won't be as good as the fifteenth time you do it. So now you have a kid who was resistant to writing that wants to try to create something like his favorite author. What *he* is passionate about. In this way, writing is not so boring or cliché. It's not about writing a five page essay. It's about: how can I deepen my reader's understanding for what I've learned.

Perla: I want to focus on that part of the knowledge and skills statement where it says "the student analyzes and applies author's craft purposefully." In our current TEKS, the old TEKS, we did that in reading as a means to access meaning. We didn't analyze as much as we identified. For example, we identified figurative language and it lived in the literary text subcomponent of the old standards. Now we have a widened lens into a wide variety of texts. Now we can analyze figurative language, not just in literary texts, but in how authors authentically use it in a variety of texts. When children begin to analyze like that, they begin to get curious and ask, "I wonder why the author did that?" Then they begin to reach and build their bank - a repertoire of tools. For a struggling writer, that would not happen in our old standards. A struggling writer needs to reach for what he can see in mentor texts to inform how he can craft the message. Now, this analysis of author's craft in the new standards allows the student to then bring in lots of strategies that authors are using to craft their work and then select from that bank. The student can say, "I'm going to use the costodas in this text. I'm going to employ them in my piece." I think that's a big shift for us - from ideas to identify the use of craft in a particular, confined text - to looking at texts at the use of something like figurative language across texts. Then writers can decide what they want to do with it when I employ it purposefully.

Barbara: As you have all been talking, you have all been hinting at that word influence. It implies a personal connection to the student's reading and the writing. Differentiation and relevance are huge at all of our campuses and districts. That word, influence, gives teachers the ability to say, "Pick up a book that means something to you. Find a way to use what that author does: like repetition, compound-complex sentences, or parallelism. It could be as simple as onomatopoeia. You can use it in your own writing so you can influence other people about what you care about." It makes differentiation easy.

Liza: I think a lot of times, we underestimate what kids can come up with on their own. In literature circles, I have a group reading *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. They are noticing the repetition. They were having this discussion when I walked up. I asked, "Why do you think the author did that?" They talked about

how the divorce was really painful to the character, and that the repetition signaled that he was constantly thinking about that. When they notice things like that, we jot them down and give them a name: repetition. They don't always know what the list is for yet, but I think having that list becomes something that we are going to use in our writing later. If students noticed something that a writer was doing- and they liked that technique - they can do something like that in their own writing. This applies to the figurative language piece as well. In any of the books we read, we create examples of how figurative language is used. We label it. We talk about why the author uses these tools. We create a figurative language list also. We use these idioms and lists to point out what they are and what they mean. After doing this for a while, I'm starting to see those in their writing. It's fabulous to see them apply those things without it being a "lesson."

Shona: I was working with a student, conferencing on his paper. The teacher had been teaching *Image Grammar* Brushstrokes. "How's it going?" I began. "Miss, I just need a vivid verb." My response? "Why do you need a vivid verb?" He quipped impatiently, "Because she says I have to have one." I think that's where we are getting to in this strand. We don't want to have simile in a paper because your teacher says you have to have a simile in your composition. We want you to have a simile because you had something to say that by using a simile, it would help the reader see what you say or understand what you mean. That's the thing that brings the relevance into our standards and into student work. We are no longer saying, "Read this and I'm going to tell you what to think about it, and how to analyze that my way, and I'm going to question you all the way through the text." The approach in author's purpose and craft strand is different. We are asking, "Why do you want to read this?" and "What are you going to do with it?" This strand is about the relevance of why we read and how it informs what we can do in response.

Kelly: In talking about the knowledge and skills statement, a lot of us referenced how the 2009 standards were almost a checkbox. Taught characterization. Check. Taught point of view. Check. I think this strand goes deeper than that. It gives us a lot of room to work with.

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# Launching a Texas-based instructional materials quality evaluation

By Kristen Dobson and Litsy Witowski, Texas Education Agency

Teachers today are often asked to do an incredibly challenging job without the resources they need to be successful. Students are coming into classrooms at all different skill and knowledge levels, and many teachers do not have access to what they need to prepare every student to meet the TEKS. With limited options at their fingertips, they find themselves creating materials from scratch or scouring the internet for materials late into the

evenings. Research indicates this is seven hours of additional work per week on top of what is already a full-time job in the classroom (Steiner, 2017).

Teachers deserve great instructional materials that include built-in supports and resources to help students at all levels to be excited to learn. Instead of

having to search for ways to reach striving students so they don't get discouraged or find activities for more advanced students so they don't get bored, teachers should be able to spend their time bringing existing lessons to life for all students. Providing teachers with better instructional materials that align to the TEKS, include rich, relevant texts, and offer supports to meet students' diverse needs will help ensure every student learns what they need to succeed in the next grade (Steiner, 2017).

In accordance with Texas Education Codes § 31.081 and § 31.082, **the online Instructional Materials Portal (IMP) will provide Texas educators with free, transparent, and user-friendly information about the quality of materials.** Local education agencies (LEAs) have the option to use this information in their local review processes, and all reviews will complement and augment the established State Board of Education's TEKS-alignment process. Local school systems can use this tool—similar to a *Consumer Reports* for instructional materials—to strengthen

and improve the efficiency of their local review processes. By making it easier for LEAs to select high-quality instructional materials, the IMP will help teachers focus their time and energy on what matters most—bringing lessons to life for all students.

More specifically, the online Instructional Materials Portal will:

- Provide free, transparent, and user-friendly information about the extent to which materials reflect research-based pedagogy and support the learning of all students
- Leverage Texas-specific rubrics designed by local educators and content experts to help ensure materials support students learning the TEKS
- Display easy-to-use reviews completed by teams of Texas educators with deep knowledge of content and pedagogy
- Make it easy for educators to search for materials based on local needs
- Increase the ease, efficiency, and accuracy of school systems' local review processes thereby reducing the burden on teachers and other review committee members

In April, TEA will seek input on the rubrics that will be used by groups of Texas educators to review K–2 and 9–12 ELAR materials. If you are interested in providing feedback, we encourage you to register for one or both of the focus groups below:

**K–2 ELAR quality evaluation rubric focus group:** Apr 10, 2019 3:30 p.m. CDT

**9–12 ELAR quality evaluation rubric focus group:** Apr 11, 2019 3:30 p.m. CDT

Please visit the TEA website [here](#) for additional information and frequently asked questions.

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## Building a better curriculum writing team

By Glen Russell, Co-Editor, *English in Texas*

One of my best friends, Robby, just finished building a table for his backyard. It looks great (I played no role in this), and was incredibly heavy to move from his garage to his back porch (I unfortunately *did* play a role in this).

While any attempt for me to fashion something out of wood runs the distinct risk of losing appendages, I do have another construction project on my hands. Over the next several months I will be helping to build and lead a curriculum writing team

responsible for overhauling our district's high school English curriculum in light of the new TEKS and instructional materials adoption. As I started crafting a plan of action, I realized that I had something I could learn from my buddy's table project.

**Study** – Robby is borderline obsessive about his research before a project. He is committed to leaving no stone unturned, and in addition to YouTube videos, home improvement websites, and HGTV, his projects almost always involve a trip to a specialty

*Continued on next page*

## Building a better curriculum writing team (continued)

store for a woodworking tool that no one else in the universe has ever heard of. He is thorough. He thoughtfully studies the craft before he takes a single step.

With our curriculum writing team, we need just as much intentionality. As part of the curriculum writing contract, writers will agree to be a part of a book study of *180 Days* (Gallagher and Kittle, 2018) with the rest of the team. The thoughtfulness that Gallagher and Kittle put into their instructional decision making is worthy of replication. In our district, we don't want to become so concerned with final outcomes that we neglect process and deliberation, so we will take the requisite time to study before we move.

**Reflect** – It isn't enough to just do the research. When Robby finished his information deep dive for the table project, he started to assimilate what he had learned. The table that he ended up planning was not an exact cookie cutter imitation of a plan that he found. Rather, it was an amalgamation of the best parts of all of his research. After he educated himself, he was able to create a plan based on what he had come to believe about designing a perfect outdoor table.

Likewise, as a curriculum writing group, we need to determine what it is we believe about curriculum design. Before we write down a single word on a single curriculum page, we will take what we have studied, reflect on our past experiences and knowledge, and we will create a set of shared beliefs. We need to explore questions like, "What is the proper balance between prescription and autonomy in a curriculum?" and, "What should our students read and write and why?" It won't be until then that we are really

ready to begin the actual construction of our curriculum.

**Frame** – The detail work of Robby's table made up a big part of his prep work. He exhaustively looked at wood options, stain application techniques, and aesthetic detailing. But before he could traverse any of those paths, he needed to build (literally) a sturdy foundation. If he didn't frame the table correctly with measured angles and high quality components, all the panache in the world wouldn't save it.

Our curriculum will need a common, solid, grounded-in-research frame as well. Despite the fact that it is often much more fun to work through all the details in a model lesson that teachers and students would both love, certain fundamental details need to be worked through first. What are the essential practices that should happen in every classroom, every day? How should students and teachers spend their time together? When a common foundation is in place, a more cohesive and consistent curriculum can be built. The beauty and features of the curriculum's detail work can be displayed from their solid structure.

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### References:

Gallagher, K., & Kittle, P. (2018). *180 days: Two teachers and the quest to engage and empower adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## The writing enigma: Grammar

By Josh Cooper, Recording Secretary

"We've been doing grammar warm-ups all year long and everytime they turn in a paper, they still have run-on sentences and comma splices." Sound familiar? It is one of the biggest challenges we face as English/Language Arts teachers: how to support students' understanding of grammar so they can improve their writing. We hear questions like this all the time when talking with colleagues: "I use Jeff Anderson's activities," "I do Don Killgallon's steps to sentence composing every day," "I pace my grammar throughout the year starting with simple sentences and ending with compound-complex sentences," "I follow a workshop approach to teaching writing, but it's time intensive and I find myself running out of space and days for grammar instruction." For some, results begin to show in those moments when we have students engaged and working through the process, but then it comes time to turn in an essay and everything they were learning while practicing just seems to vanish.

This begs the question that if we spend so much time and effort helping students to improve their grammatical skills, but skills do not transfer out of that moment, should we continue to spend such large amounts of time on the teaching of grammar? It can be incredibly frustrating to figure out how to balance everything we have to do in our classrooms, but grammar does have a place within the work we do when teaching the writing process.

My colleagues and I were lucky enough to have Mary

Ehrenworth, Deputy Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, visit our district just a few days ago and it was exactly the thing we needed to begin to wrap our minds around how to address the enigma that is the teaching of grammar.

Mary shared with us the stages of language acquisition, and how they relate to a child learning how to write with sophistication. The four stages of language acquisition are:

1. Immersion
2. Approximation
3. Mastery
4. Slippage

Each stage has its own characteristics, and children move in and out of them depending on the concepts of language they are learning. Mastery, of course, is what we seek for students. We want children to write with correctness and clarity, and so we are constantly trying to push children to show mastery in their writing. It is important to remember that children can achieve mastery with some concepts, like end punctuation, but it may take them a very long time to reach mastery with other concepts like verb tense.

Students first learn how our language works through the immersion stage early on in life. Early in life, students begin to

*Continued on next page*

## The writing enigma: Grammar (continued)

learn the constructs of how our language works through hearing it on a daily basis. This has important implications for parents and early grade-school teachers. Read-alouds are critical in developing a child's understanding of how we communicate beyond just vocabulary. Even without seeing punctuation, pronouns, or verbs shifting tenses, children begin to internalize the rhythm of language through listening to the fluent reading from adults. They quickly develop a reader's ear, which helps when they begin to learn how to read and eventually, how to write. As teachers, we can leverage this learning even later in life with the use of read-alouds in our classroom that can be centered around particular grammar concepts, creating teachable moments that help students gain grammar acquisition and not just language acquisition.

Immersion and developing a reader's ear leads to approximation, which has important implications for our teaching practice and how we speak to and engage students in understanding grammar. What Mary shared with us regarding this stage was eye-opening. Approximation is the stage where language acquisition is happening, but children are testing their knowledge of concepts in different situations without 100 percent accuracy. Unfortunately for those who seek mastery out of our students, this is a stage that a child lives in from grades K-12. Let me repeat that. Grades K-12. This new understanding explains why we can teach them the same grammar concepts year after year, yet they don't seem to reach mastery. It is not that students don't get it. It is that they are still acquiring this concept and are testing the waters in a variety of situations.

If we do not keep this understanding of approximation in mind, then we can end up doing some real damage to students when working with them on editing their papers. Approximation might look something like a student essay with run-on sentences and/or misplaced commas. If we remind ourselves what stage of language acquisition children are in, then the positive of what is happening here is that students are trying to relay more complex thoughts or build more complicated sentences. Students may even know that they are supposed to have punctuation, but they might not be sure where it goes (hence the plethora of commas sprinkled throughout their writing). The easy "fix" in our minds when we see this is to tell them to add a period to stop the sentence from being a run-on, but that is counterintuitive to what the child wants to do in their writing. When we do this, we just make their writing more simple instead of helping them achieve accuracy so they can grow into more sophisticated writers.

Instead of "fixing" that problem, we need to applaud the effort so they keep trying and then support with targeted grammar instruction. What Mary reminded us is that it takes multiple attempts working with the same concept and understanding to move from approximation into mastery. Rather than try to fit as much grammar instruction in as we can in a year, we should

instead focus on 4 to 5 concepts to work on in multiple ways and vertically align these with the schools in our feeder zones to scaffold grammar appropriately.

Once the grammar that will be taught is narrowed down, then you can get into the teaching of these concepts. There are a number of different methods we can use to help students move closer to mastery of the concepts we want them to learn. Directly teaching these concepts with the use of a mentor text and demonstrating the grammar in your own writing helps students take difficult grammar and begin to understand. They can play with it as a craft move for their writing as opposed to only an editing rule to "fix" at the end. We can also set up inquiry centers with several mentor texts and pose a question to students. Through that question and discovery process using the mentor texts to figure out the rules, students begin to internalize these concepts and we can then direct them to employ what they just discovered in their own writing. We can even ask students to create tools for other, younger students to learn grammar that they are starting to become familiar with, thus giving them another chance to further play and understand how this grammar works in new situations. These multiple chances to learn four or five concepts helps students move from approximation into mastery.

Imagine, for a moment, teaching students how to use interesting punctuation like dashes or parentheses in their writing correctly. Reminding ourselves that students are in the approximation stage of language acquisition, we plan our instruction so that they can take many laps around that concept through a few different teaching methods (which, in turn, allows them to move closer and closer to mastery). We keep in our minds that perfection is not what we are seeking, just attempts at using this punctuation when it seems to work in their own writing. Students can be introduced to these concepts through their reading and then practice using these concepts in their writing. Maybe a few weeks later, students create tools to teach others how to use this punctuation, giving them another lap around using this kind of punctuation. They may still not be perfect by the end of the year, but you have seen them engage and attempt in their own writing and there is power in that.

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### Reference:

Mary Ehrenworth, personal communication, February 5th, 2019.



## Thinking ahead

By Eve Zehavi, Co-editor, *English in Texas*

April is National Poetry Month, and the Elementary Section is already thinking ahead. Poetry has many benefits for children. It promotes phonemic awareness, it helps develop prosody, it fosters creativity, and helps young children find their voices (So, 2017). We would like to share a few suggestions for using poetry in your classroom and how you can enhance your practice with just a few lines of verse.

Nonsense rhyme is a delight for children and fosters a love and understanding of word play. A classic example of poetry that supports phonemic awareness and an understanding of phonics is Dr. Seuss's *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*.

I like to box.  
How I like to box!  
So, every day,  
I box my Gox.  
In yellow socks  
I box my Gox.  
I box in yellow Gox box socks.

This delightful short excerpt is both engaging and beneficial for building a knowledge of how phonetics works.

Another type of poetry, free verse, can also open the door to critical thinking for young children. There is a common belief that young children do not enjoy free verse. This has been borne out in some research (Terry, 1974), but Jonda McNair suggests that the "right" free verse poems, ones that are simple and relevant to a child's life, can be very powerful. Poetry also promotes thinking outside the box through the use of metaphor. While this may seem too sophisticated for a young child, think about how accessible this poem by Valerie Worth.

### book

Such a  
Bountiful  
Box of  
Tricks:  
Packed  
With the  
Five senses,  
The seven  
Seas, the  
Earth's  
Four winds  
And corners,  
All fitted  
Exactly in.

Even young children exposed to read alouds can think deeply and understand what it means to compare a book to a box of tricks or comprehend how the right book engages the senses. A final type of poem that

children can embrace is one that speaks to their innate sense of humor. Pretulusky, Silverstein, and Katz all engage and amuse young children (Carpenter and Lansky, 1994). There is something to be said for simply delighting in language. How can you deprive children of the simple joy of silliness?

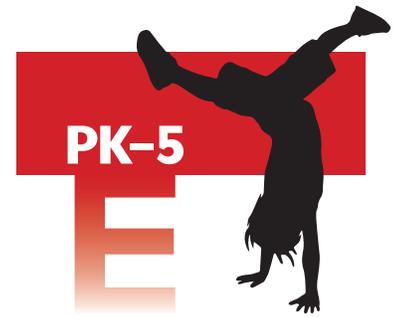
Oh, Woe Ith Me!  
Ath I wath biking  
down the thtweet,  
I hit a bump  
and loht my theat.  
I cwathed my bike  
into a twee,  
I thcwathed my fathe,  
Oh, owoe ith me.  
My bike itsh wecked,  
I've no excuthe.  
And wortht of all,  
my tooth itsh looth.

Sharing poetry with children not only supports their learning in so many ways, but is one of the great joys of teaching. Happy National Poetry Month!

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### References:

- Carpenter, S., & Lansky, B. (1994). *A bad case of the giggles: Kids' favorite funny poems*. Deephaven, MN : New York: Meadowbrook Press.
- McNair, J. (2012). Poems about sandwich cookies, jelly, and chocolate: Poetry in K—3 classrooms. *YC Young Children*, 67(4), 94. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.uhd.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.42731232&site=eds-live&scope=site>
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- Worth, V. (1994). *All the small poems and fourteen more*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.



# The new TEKS strand 2: Comprehension skills and Beers and Probst’s “Book, Head, Heart”

By Stephen Winton, Ed.D., President-Elect

 <p>In the <b>BOOK</b></p>	 <p>In my <b>HEAD</b></p>	 <p>In my <b>HEART</b></p>
<p>What’s this about? Who’s telling the story? What does the author want me to know?</p>	<p>What surprised me? What does the author think I already know? What challenged, changed, or confirmed what I knew? What did I notice?</p>	<p>What did I learn about me? How will this help me be better?</p>

There are many changes in the new ELAR TEKS, one of which is the emphasis on synthesizing in grades K-5. In the old TEKS under Figure 19, students are expected to retell in grades K-2, summarize in grades 3-5, and synthesize in grades 6-12. Synthesizing is mentioned in elementary in research and in reading expository texts in grade 5, but as with other aspects of the old TEKS, isolating this skill to parts of our reading is problematic. In the new TEKS Strand 2: Comprehension Skills, students are expected to “synthesize information to create new understanding” in grades K-12 (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

This is a big change.

When we synthesize, we make meaning about how what we read impacts our lives and our understanding of the world. One useful way to do this is with Kylene Beers and Bob Probst’s strategy Book, Head, Heart from *Disrupting Thinking* (2017, p. 63).

The “book” and “head” sections of Book, Head, Heart work like many comprehension-based graphic organizers, asking readers to connect text clues to their thinking. But the “heart” is new. When we model and ask students what is in our hearts, what we learned about ourselves, how this will help us be better, we synthesize. Perhaps even more importantly, we shift instruction towards joyful and meaningful reading.

An advantage of Book, Head, Heart is the accessibility of the language. Beers and Probst write, “It’s simple. Direct. And it keeps kids focused on where they must begin— with what’s in the book – and where they must end – with how it’s changing them” (p. 63). There is nothing in Strand 2: Comprehension Skills one could not teach with Book, Head, Heart and the powerful, elegant language helps make meaning.

I look forward to exploring the new ELAR TEKS using Book, Head, Heart as a reading framework. If you are looking for ideas on Strand 2: Comprehension Skills, check it out!

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**References:**

Beers, K. & Probst, R.E. (2017). *Disrupting thinking: Why how we read matters*. New York: Scholastic.

Texas Education Agency. (2017). *19 TAC chapter 110. Texas essential knowledge and skills for English language arts and reading*. Retrieved from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/index.html>

## The dark descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein: A teacher’s review, teaching ideas, and connections

By Heather Pule, Ed.D., Co-Editor *English in Texas*

In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Elizabeth Lavenza is merely a supporting character for Victor Frankenstein, an adopted sister. In Kiersten White’s *The Dark Descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein*, Elizabeth Lavenza is the lead character in a story about her relationship and life that begs the question, “What does a monster look like?”

Elizabeth is taken out of an abusive childhood environment and adopted by the Frankensteins as a friend for Victor. Victor’s parents are under the impression that Elizabeth is the last hope for a son who they do not understand and, really, are afraid to try.

Elizabeth understands that Victor is her way out. She not only befriends him, but she becomes his confidant, his consoler, and his unending support. She knows that if he does not need her, then neither do the Frankensteins, and she is not going back to her former life of abuse and neglect. However, although Elizabeth has learned to support Victor in his endeavors no matter the cost, the reader soon understands that Elizabeth and Victor are not the same. As Victor’s life plays out, the reader begins to question to what lengths Elizabeth is willing to push aside her longing for freedom and a different life to solidify her place in the

*Continued on next page*

**A teacher’s review, teaching ideas, and connections (continued)**

Frankenstein household.

Readers will follow the journey of a strong, complex, female character that will take the reader on just as many twists and turns as Victor did in the original work. Through masterfully crafted scenes, White takes readers on a thrilling, thought-provoking journey of Elizabeth’s life as she devotes herself to Victor and along the way starts to wonder whose life she is really saving. Can she be “alive” when she is living for someone else?

The dark and suspenseful plot of *The Dark Descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein* mirrors the plot line of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,

which makes this an enjoyable book for readers who are familiar with *Frankenstein* and also for readers who have never ventured into its pages.

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**Reference:**

White, K. (2018). *The dark descent of Elizabeth Frankenstein*. New York: Delacorte Press.

**Teaching Ideas and Connections:**

Essential Questions	How much of who we are is shaped by those around us? What happens when everything we are depends on someone else?
Ideas, Motifs, and Themes	Nature (setting and character development) Family Monsters The influence of others on our identity The effects of people’s choices
Suggested Grade levels	English I English II
Modes of Instruction/Reading	Book Clubs or Literature Circles Taught in place of <i>Frankenstein</i> Excerpts paired with <i>Frankenstein</i> Used as a book talk during the study of <i>Frankenstein</i> (or vice versa)
TEKS Connections	<i>Strand 4: Multiple Genres</i> <i>English I</i> 6.A analyze how themes are developed through characterization and plot in a variety of literary texts; 6.C analyze non-linear plot development such as flashbacks, foreshadowing, subplots, and parallel plot structures and compare it to linear plot development; and <i>English II</i> 6.A analyze how themes are developed through characterization and plot, including comparing similar themes in a variety of literary texts representing different cultures; 6.C analyze isolated scenes and their contribution to the success of the plot as a whole; and
	<i>Strand 6: Composition</i> <i>English I and II</i> 10.A compose literary texts such as fiction and poetry using genre characteristics and craft; (Use a mentor text for writing, can be aligned with above TEKS for plot, setting, and character development)



# The Library Book by Susan Orlean

By Margaret Hale, Executive Secretary, Editor, *English in Texas*

Typically when I get lost in a book, it’s a middle grade or young adult text, fiction or nonfiction. However, a good friend gave me a copy of *The Library Book* for Christmas, and within days, my brain’s reticular activation system kicked into high gear, and I began seeing and hearing about it everywhere.

Looking at the outside of the book, a friend remarked that the cover didn’t seem appealing. I can see why some might say that—it does not have a colorful dust jacket, but instead is bound in a red fabric material with gold lettering. But opening it and looking at the endpapers is a different experience altogether. The back endpaper has what appears to be an incredibly realistic old-fashioned library pocket and card. The card even contains some names scratched through as if they have recently returned the book.

Enough about its physical aspects. The story between the covers is fascinating! Orlean pays homage to public libraries by weaving a tapestry of stories connected to the Los Angeles Central Library and the fire that engulfed it in April of 1986. In telling the story, you learn not just about how the fire may have started, but meet all kinds of characters along the way.

As I read, I met some of the head librarians who have served over its many years, including Althea Warren, who took over in

August 1933. Orlean writes that Warren “believed librarians’ single greatest responsibility was to read voraciously.” (198) I can relate to Warren, and you probably can, too! I met quirky librarians who answer the telephones in the InfoNow section of the library and learned about the myriad questions they are asked every day by random callers, including, “Which is more evil, grasshoppers or crickets?” (233) Orlean took me on rounds of the library with the head security guard and introduced me to the variety of homeless people who spend their days in the library. I learned that fighting homelessness is a battle many libraries take on.

If you are like me and have a special place in your heart for libraries, I urge you to pick this book up and immerse yourself in the stories. You may not finish it knowing for sure what caused the library fire in Los Angeles in 1986, but I promise you that you will never look at libraries the same way again!

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**Reference:**

Orlean, Susan. (2018). *The library book*. New York, New York: Simon & Schuster.

# Do you see me?

By Sharrisse Holloman, Electronic Communications Manager

This poem was birthed from a place that recognizes the need for diverse conversations, literature, and the sharing of human experiences. When we as educators write for these occasions, our student’s eyes can be opened to experiences that they otherwise may never come to know. The writing below is not only about African-American culture but the diversity represented in all our classrooms. We must see our students for who they are and where they come from in order to harvest a classroom culture of acceptance, empathy, and respect.

**Do You See Me?**

My existence is more than a body in your classroom  
I’m equipped with the ability to supersede any expectations set before me  
Do You See Me?

Society embraces my culture but disrespects my color  
Don’t define me by a label that was created by others  
Do You See Me?

Recognize and acknowledge the stock that runs through my veins  
I’m a descendent of African Kings and Queens  
Do You See Me?

My history is more than Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King  
Let’s discuss the Little Rock Nine, Black Wall Street, and the visionaries that came before me  
Do You See Me?

Now, these things that I’m asking for are much easier than it seems  
Society needs a melodic communication between mentor and mentee  
Do You See Me?

My existence is more than a body in your classroom  
Do You See Me?  
You See Me?  
See Me

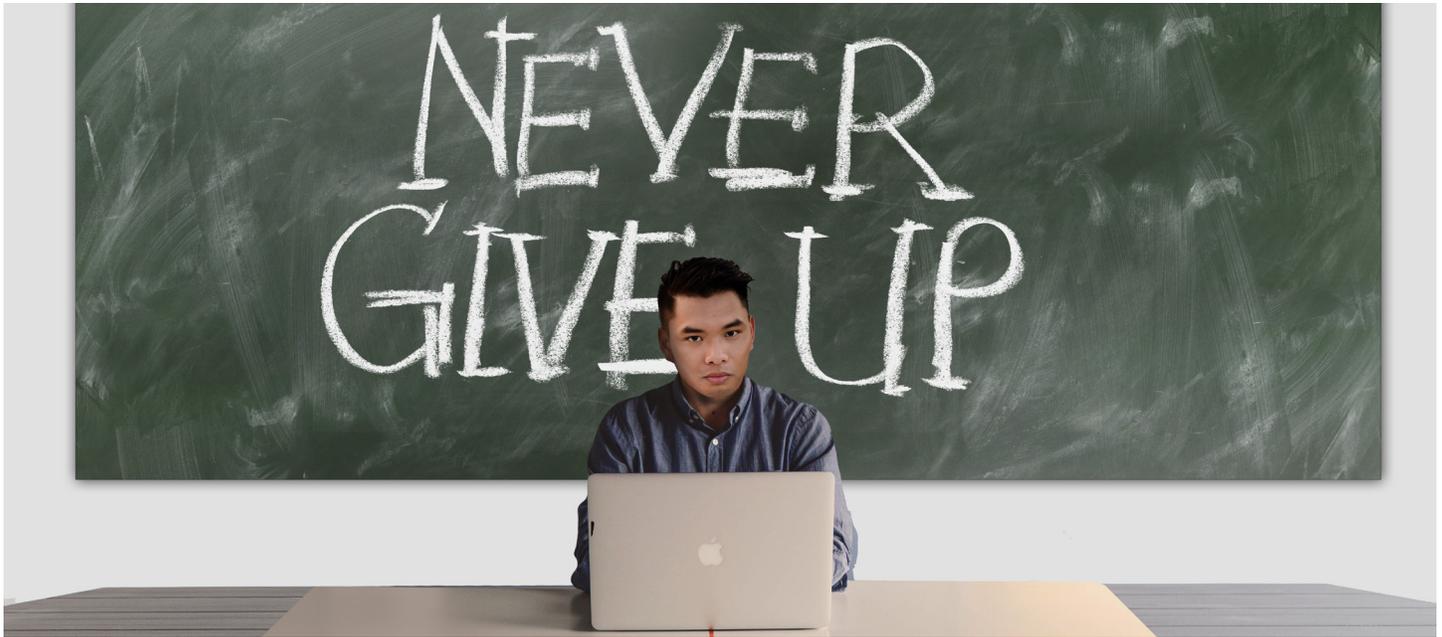


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## Notes to a new teacher

by Shona Rose, Region 16

Dear New Teacher,

Save five minutes for closure. When you send the students off to work, ask them to keep these ideas in the back of their minds.

- **Greatest Insight or Contribution:** What was the most significant idea or “a-ha?” Who said something particularly interesting or phrased something beautifully or clearly? What did they say? Why is this important?
- **Important Point or Distinction:** What did you notice that was critical to understanding? Is there something new worth pointing out?
- **Struggle and Solution:** Where have you struggled? What isn't working? What seems to be working?
- **Link to Reading, Writing, or Yesterday's/Today's/Tomorrow's Lessons:** How might this learning connect to other things you are reading and researching? How might we use these ideas or craft moves in our own writing? How does the work today connect to what we did yesterday, today, and what we might consider tomorrow?

As you circulate to monitor, refine, and extend student learning, jot down notes and names of group and student contributions to celebrate. Be looking for key misconceptions (pseudo-concepts) that might need re-teaching.

In the last few moments of class, bring the class back together to reflect. Pose the four types of responses. Give students some time to pause, think, and jot ideas. Ask students to pair or square to share ideas with those near them. Then select two to three students to share the high points of their discussion. You'll have the perfect opportunity to refine, extend, or re-teach key learning outcomes. You may even have noticed something or someone special to bring forward to the group. Saving five minutes to consolidate and celebrate learning will be well worth everyone's time.

Sincerely,  
Your TCTELA Advocate  
[shona.rose@esc16.net](mailto:shona.rose@esc16.net)

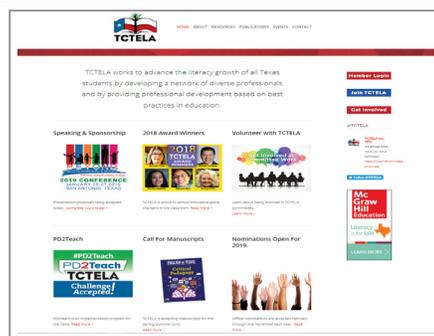
### from the blogosphere...

Fill your tank with loads of instructional ideas at:

- <http://twowritingteachers.org>
- <https://www.weareteachers.com>
- <https://pernillesripp.com>
- <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com>
- <https://blog.heinemann.com>
- <https://readingbyexample.com>

### ...to the website

Visit us online at: <http://www.tctela.org>



# TCTELA Conference Photos



Award-winning author Carole Boston Weatherford  
<https://cbweatherford.com>



Book signing with Jason Reynolds  
<https://www.jasonwritesbooks.com>



What? Free copies of *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds? Kelly Milmo, Betsy Gardner, and Candice Carter from Waller ISD are all in!



Welcome to the conference! Vanessa Molina, Rachel Croci, Leslie Perez, and Andrea Khawaja of Lake Travis ISD



Membership Celebration: Pre-Gaming with TCTELA



Southwest Legacy High School Mariachi Performance from Southwest ISD



Northside ISD Ballet Folklorico

## Award Winners



Elementary Teacher of the Year Ghida Hijazi from Houston ISD



Middle School Teacher of the Year Yolanda Gonzales from Beeville ISD

## Section Chairs

Looking for a way to get involved in TCTELA? Sections gather in person and virtually to discuss grade-level successes and concerns, generate summer reading lists, focus on literacy needs, and support teachers. If you are interested in joining a section, contact the appropriate section chair.

Elementary School Section  
 Amelia Hewitt  
[hewitta@uhd.edu](mailto:hewitta@uhd.edu)

Middle School Section  
 Liz Henson  
[lizghenson@gmail.com](mailto:lizghenson@gmail.com)

High School Section  
 Charles Moore  
[mooreliteracy1@gmail.com](mailto:mooreliteracy1@gmail.com)

Teacher Development  
 Tomasina Burkhardt  
[tomasina.burkhardt@region10.org](mailto:tomasina.burkhardt@region10.org)

Pre-Service Teacher Committee  
 Jim Warren  
[jewarren@uta.edu](mailto:jewarren@uta.edu)

**Award Winners (continued)**



**High School Teacher of the Year Karen Otto from Carroll ISD**



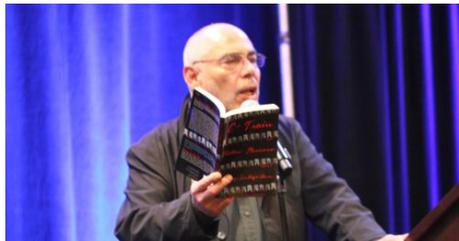
**College Teacher of the Year Lynn Masterson from Texas State University**



**Edmund J. Farrell Lifetime Achievement Award winner Kim Pinkerton and Past President Diane Miller**



**Mercedes Bonner Award winner Victoria Orepitan**



**Jimmy Santiago Baca reads from *C-Train and Thirteen Mexicans*.**

<https://www.jimmysantiagobaca.com>



**Abisag Hurtado, Brandice Armstrong, and Carolos Diaz from Aldine ISD**



**Tim Martindell and Gretchen Bernabei at "This I Believe" session.**



**Texas ELA teachers gather to go "Beyond Boots, Borders, and Books."**

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

***English in Texas*, Vol. 49.1 (Spring/Summer 2019)**

**Theme: Reflections: Beyond Boots, Borders, and Books: The many Faces of Literacy in Texas**

**Manuscript Deadline: April 1, 2019**

**Column Deadline: April 15, 2019**

### **Call for Submissions:**

The 2019 TCTELA conference theme is “Beyond Boots, Borders, and Books: The Many Faces of Literacy in Texas.” While Texas has its stereotypes, it is a state full of diversity. Our classrooms reflect this in their makeup of multiple races, ethnicities, and nationalities. In any classroom, you can encounter students that speak different languages, come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, have different gender identities, and vary in their achievement statuses, and we welcome them all. Rather than stereotype, it is our privilege as teachers to engage all of these students in our English language arts classrooms.

TCTELA members devote their teaching lives to creating spaces that recognize and honor the diverse lives and literacies that live in our classrooms. *We embrace the diversity of our students and of our discipline.* We know firsthand that stereotypes are dismantled through critical questioning and thought followed by respectful listening, especially when the answers do not match our preconceived responses.

We encourage you to think about how you create these spaces in your ELA classroom. How do you navigate backgrounds, levels, and interests through literacy-oriented pursuits? What roles do written, spoken, digitized, and visual texts play in your classroom that support these ideas? How do you use writing to honor your students’ diversity of self and of study? How do the dynamic definitions of literacy continue to shift for you and your students?

We invite interested individuals to submit manuscripts, conceptual, pedagogical, research-based, and theoretical, as related to this topic of “Beyond Boots, Borders, and Books: The Many Faces of Literacy in Texas.” Please refer to the *English in Texas* website for manuscript submission guidelines. Do not hesitate to contact the editorial team at [EnglishinTexas@uh.edu](mailto:EnglishinTexas@uh.edu) should you have any questions.

Furthermore, we invite interested individuals to submit ideas for our Spring/Summer columns, “Putting It All Together” and “The Tech-Savvy Teacher” as related to the theme of “Beyond Boots, Borders, and Books: The Many Faces of Literacy in Texas.” The below descriptions detail each column as well as provide information for contacting the column editor regarding your column idea. Please query the column editor **BEFORE** submitting your full column.

### **The columns to be published in the Spring/Summer Issues:**

***Putting It All Together:*** This column focuses on opportunities teachers provide to integrate reading, writing, listening and speaking. What are some successes you’ve had in integrating reading, writing, listening and speaking? What resources have you consulted? How do your students respond to integrated lessons as opposed to isolated lessons? To submit a column for publication consideration, please contact the editorial team at [EnglishinTexas@uh.edu](mailto:EnglishinTexas@uh.edu).

***The Tech-Savvy Teacher:*** This column focuses on ways to incorporate technology into your daily teaching. What are some technology tools you’ve found useful? How do these tools inform your instruction? How do students respond to these tools? What is required to use these tools? To submit a column for publication consideration, please contact the editorial team at [EnglishinTexas@uh.edu](mailto:EnglishinTexas@uh.edu).