

TEXAS VOICES



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

President's message

Onward by Margaret Hale, TCTELA President, *Texas Voices*

Well, another year has gone by—and it has been a roller coaster. As an organization, we have moved from working collaboratively in the TEKS revision process to making plans to support teachers across the state with implementation of those standards. Many members and their students experienced tremendous loss due to Hurricane Harvey, and yet they have continued to move forward. And as we wrap up the year and move into 2018, we approach the 2018 TCTELA Annual Conference and Exhibition with eager anticipation.

I am excited to see you all January 26-28 on Galveston Island for a great weekend during which we will fuel our fires to thrive as teachers. Our broad range of speakers will be sure to energize you for the spring semester. Those authors include Anne Goudvis, Alfred Tatum, Leah Ames, Gravity Goldberg, Guadalupe Garcia McCall, Jocelyn Chadwick, Pernille Ripp, Kathi Appelt, Cynthia Leitich Smith, Jan Burkins, Kim Yaris, Chris Lehman, and some surprise tradebook authors at the Sunday breakfast event.

Many of you know the energy that comes from being a part of a professional organization, and you know that networking with colleagues in a conference setting can be invigorating and empowering. I learned this from colleagues in my third year of teaching when I attended my very first professional conference. Not only was it motivating; it was also eye opening. It helped me see that there was a whole world of teachers beyond my school and district. A whole new level of support. And in today's more connected world, those colleagues we meet at conferences can become an even stronger support system for us. So I encourage you to reach out to those newer teachers in your school or district and help connect them to TCTELA or another professional organization. Help them discover the power of a professional organization as you have.

I wish you all a relaxing holiday season, and I thank you for allowing me to serve you and TCTELA for the last year as president. Please make sure to keep in touch!

grithale@aol.com

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NCTE convention keynote by Jacqueline Woodson: “Encourage students to tell their stories”

By Tracy Kriese, NCTE Affiliate Liaison

“I am that student who showed up in class with the work not done, who talked in class, who rolled my eyes at you, who thought she would never move beyond that small space she lived in,” began Jacqueline Woodson as she addressed the NCTE convention in Saturday’s opening session. Woodson expressed amazement about being there in St. Louis, wondering aloud how she came to be in a hall full of English teachers.

“How did I get here, when I had grown up as a kid who believed she had nothing to say?” she asked. The award-winning author of more than two dozen books explained that she wrote her memoir *Brown Girl Dreaming* in part to explore the question of how she came to be a published writer. Although reading and writing did not come easily to her, she discovered in her childhood that she had a passion for both. Her mother made sure she had a library card and access to many, many books when she was growing up. “Once you hear story, once you begin to know characters, you’re on your way,” said Woodson, speaking of the inspiration her own child now feels when he listens to audiobooks.

The credit for Woodson’s love of reading and writing also goes to “teachers who pushed [her], who SAW [her].” Teachers are gatekeepers, she explained. Teachers decide the tone of a classroom, and from there students figure out the answers to their pressing questions: *Will I be welcome? Will I be accepted? Am I important?*

We can make sure that in our classrooms, we see our students. We see them, and we hear them. We offer diverse books because our students are unique individuals; we offer choice in writing because each of our students has a unique voice. With so many curriculum demands on language arts classes, it can be a challenge to find time for self-selected reading and writing, but meeting that challenge is central to successful, meaningful literacy education.

Our classrooms need to be places where all students can be seen and heard. So many stories have yet to be told, said Woodson, so we must encourage our students to tell theirs.

Woodson worked with students this year as part of a literacy partnership with St. Louis classrooms. One of the students asked the author what drives her to keep telling her stories and publishing books. “I want to stay visible,” Woodson answered. “I want to be seen. I want the people that I love to be seen.”

Literacy education holds that promise of discovery for teacher and student alike, affirming a truth that Woodson expressed so beautifully for her St. Louis audience:

“You create your world. You create the world you are going to grow into and be fabulous in. That is the journey....You not only have a right to be here, but you have a right to be here fabulously.”

tkriese@eanesisd.net



TCTELA Board of Directors

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grithale@aol.com

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petersond@uhd.edu

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katgonmom@gmail.com

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shona.rose@esc16.net

Electronic Communications Manager

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kay.shurtleff@gmail.com

SLATE/NCTE Representative

Tracy Kriese, Eanes ISD
tkriese@eanesisd.net

Editor, Texas Voices

Kristen Nance, Fort Bend ISD
kristen.nance@fortbendisd.com

Editors, English in Texas

Dawn Westfall, University of Houston
englishintexas@uh.edu

Margaret Hale, University of Houston
englishintexas@uh.edu

Glen Russell, University of Houston
englishintexas@uh.edu

Heather Pule, University of Houston
englishintexas@uh.edu

Eve Zehavi, University of Houston
englishintexas@uh.edu

Roni Dean-Burren, University of Houston
englishintexas@uh.edu

Executive Director

Amy Blakely
512-617-3200
amyblakely@ventureall.com

TCTELA

919 Congress Avenue #1400
Austin, Texas 78701
512-617-3200

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The Red Poets' Society takes St. Louis

By Diane M. Miller, Ph.D., TCTELA President-Elect

When you drive past Cy-Lakes High School, situated near the border of Katy and Cy-Fair ISDs, you might assume that it is a typical suburban campus. In many ways, it is. The typical classes, practices, and interactions occur. However, what you do not see from the road is the vibrant community of poets, proud Spartans who live to write and perform poetry and call themselves "The Red Poets' Society." Fortunately, the attendees at the recent NCTE convention had the opportunity to hear from some of these Red Poets when they were featured in Jimmy Santiago Baca's keynote address that opened the first General Session.

Several months prior, Dr. Jocelyn Chadwick, TCTELA member and NCTE President, contacted the TCTELA board for assistance with her conference ideas, and we were more than happy to help. Dr. Chadwick shared her vision for reinvigorating the keynote addresses at the convention. Her goal was to eschew the normal lecture format for an interactive experience, complete with students' contributions and town-hall style Q&A. After brainstorming about the possibilities, we got to work to make that vision happen.

I contacted Ami Ruby, the Secondary ELAR Coordinator for Cy-Fair ISD, and described the request: we needed a high school English class willing to work with Mr. Baca in a study of his poetry. Ms. Layla Montgomery, the English department chair at Cy-Lakes, surpassed our minimum request. She introduced us to students in her classes who were members of the after-school group, the Red Poets' Society, sponsored by Ms. Katina Politte.



A view of the interactive white board during the students' conversation with Jimmy Santiago Baca and Dr. Jocelyn Chadwick.

By the time our initial Zoom conference ended, the students had inspired Mr. Baca to revise his original plan for the project. Yes, the students would still study Mr. Baca's poetry and record their questions to be used in his NCTE keynote, but after meeting the students, this world-renowned poet was inspired. He invited the Red Poets to share their original work with his national audience.

True to their pledge (see Figure 1), the students did not "speak quietly." Instead, their poetry performances were displayed on huge screens in front of thousands of English teachers! Brandon's poem, "Original Soldiers," provoked us to reflect on the power of students' voices: "I am me...the simple yet complex with mental contacts..." Next, Armonie reminded us of the gritty realities many students face in her piece about abuse called "Child's Play."

Mr. Baca warned the audience that many students' "spirits are slowly being strangled" and that he believes poetry can "show them how to unleash their love." The Red Poets' contributions certainly illustrated that love. He challenged the convention attendees to teach "outside the margins of regular education" and to take students "beyond the frontiers of approval or acceptance."

He closed by asking a difficult question: "When will we turn our classrooms into places where we learn how to speak again... to speak the hardest truths?" After facilitating this multi-dimensional poetry project, I can confidently say that in many of our Texas schools, especially in Ms. Montgomery's English class and Ms. Politte's after-school meetings, we are nurturing and showcasing students' voices, taking them "outside the margins" and "beyond the frontiers."

petersond@uhd.edu

We write to live
And live to write
Our eyes on the prize
It's still in sight
We got something to say
And we won't speak quietly
We come from the heart
We're the Red Poets' Society!

Figure 1: The pledge of the Cy-Lakes High School Red Poets' Society



Red Poets show off their group's pledge on custom hoodies.

#WhyMiddleMatters at NCTE 2017

By Margaret Hale, President, *Texas Voices*

For the past year I have had the privilege of serving on NCTE's Middle Level Section Steering Committee. This group works to encourage membership and leadership in the middle level and helps to shape programming and publications for the middle level members of NCTE.

Since I first met with the group last November at the conclusion of the 2016 NCTE Annual Convention, we have been working to plan out a series of sessions geared to middle level attendees for the 2017 convention. This series of sessions, called #WhyMiddleMatters, began in 2016 and continued this year, and we have already begun planning for #NCTE2018 in Houston, Texas!

The 2017 series of sessions included six opportunities. #WhyMiddleMatters began with the Middle Section Get-Together that we call the Meet Up. Its aim was to support the 25th anniversary of NCTE's middle level journal, *Voices from the Middle*. Past editors, including our own Kylene Beers, spoke during the meet up, which was a great way to start the convention. The #WhyMiddleMatters sessions continued with

a session featuring authors of series books for middle graders, including Texas' own Jeff Anderson, plus Soman Chainani, Molly B. Burnham, Alex London, and another Texas author, Christina Soontornvat. Other #WhyMiddleMatters sessions focused on surviving teaching middle school, student-led roundtables where the students talked about diverse books they had read, and a panel of authors who contributed to the anthology *Flying Lessons* edited by Elleh Oh.

Finally, TCTELA's own Traci Teaff, 2017 Middle School Teacher of the Year, participated in a session that featured outstanding middle grades educators leading roundtable discussions focused on engaging and successful teaching practices in their classrooms.

If you are a middle grades educator, make sure to plan for NCTE 2018 in Houston and look for this strand of sessions, #WhyMiddleMatters. It will be a great way to find your home in NCTE.

grithale@aol.com

NCTE Secondary Section happenings

By Amanda Palmer, Secretary

The Secondary Section is comprised of high school English teachers and those that support them. I have had the great fortune to be elected to serve on the eight person Secondary Section Steering Committee for a four year term.

The Secondary Section has three main events that it hosts during the NCTE annual conference: a Thursday evening Secondary Section Get-Together, the High School Matters session, and the Secondary Section Luncheon. Each of these events is designed to cater to the needs and interests of high school English teachers.

This year's Secondary Section Get Together speaker was Lois Lowry. And she would have been amazing if she had made it to the stage. However, a bad fall right before the event (like 30 minutes before) left the poor author in the emergency room (she is okay) and the Get Together with upwards of 300 attendees and no speaker. Luckily, the ever irreverent Laurie Halse Anderson stepped in and spoke with such passion that it was difficult to believe she had just been asked to change out of her pajamas, leave her hotel, and head over to the convention center.

The Secondary Section Luncheon featured Daniel Jose Older, author of the acclaimed *Shadow Shapers* series. He spoke with such authenticity that Carol Jago rushed to the stage to shake his hand. He noted that "teaching and writing are a lot like love. Done well there's a magic to it that cannot be explained." I will be holding onto this idea for many years to come.

Finally, the section hosts the High School Matters session.

This is an opportunity for teachers to share their craft amongst colleagues through round table presentations. The session also hosts an influential figure who speaks to challenges of high school instruction. I encourage our membership to submit proposals to participate in this session in Houston at NCTE 2018.

It's these events—the section get-togethers, sessions, and luncheon—where teachers have an opportunity to sit among their people, learn and laugh together, and, ultimately, feel the magic of the NCTE annual conference.

Additionally, the Secondary Section Steering Committee meets on the Thursday and Sunday of the conference to plan for the future and discuss avenues to improve teacher support. This year, the committee discussed and planned around a goal of pushing the voices of the section's membership forward. We are actively pursuing opportunities to highlight the work that is occurring in high schools across America.

One way to do this is through the Engage Now blog series. This blog is an opportunity for committee members to share lessons for teachers to take back to their classrooms. I am currently slated to write for the January and May posts. I would like to work with a Texas classroom teacher as a co-author. Please reach out to me at the email address below if you are interested in collaborating and sharing a lesson from your classroom.

amandakpalmer@katyisd.org



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Censorship: Tools for productive conversations

By Eve Zehavi, Editor, *English in Texas*

Recent events have brought to the fore the age-old question of censorship in schools. As a teacher and librarian, I feel compelled to venture into the discussion. In the state of Texas last year 13 books were challenged and 5 were ultimately banned. These books can be in libraries or classrooms, as assigned reading or just shelved somewhere.

It may be of little comfort, but banning books is not new. The arbitrary nature of book challenges become apparent when you look at banned book titles (*see ALA's Top 100 banned books*) which include classics like *Of Mice and Men* and early readers like *Junie B. Jones*. According to a recent article in Time Magazine, reasons for challenging books included unsuitability for age group, racism, anti-family themes, violence, sexually explicit themes or language, offensive language, and religious viewpoints. But whatever the reason, it is important to remember that most book challenges stem from a genuine concern for the educational well-being of students. It is our job to be able to speak to these concerns in a professional and informed manner.

All educators should be aware of their district-wide policy. At a minimum this should include a formal complaint form (see a sample in the NCTE position statement on the *Right to Read*), a standing committee prepared to deal with the contingency of a challenged book, and a timeline and list of procedures for acting on a complaint. Most issues related to book selection begin with the teacher, so how can you prepare yourself? NCTE recommends having a written rationale for book selection. This in

many ways mimics the formal complaint form—just as we want to know why a particular selection is objectionable to a parent or community member, we need to be able to articulate why each text is valuable to us. What objectives does it serve? How will students be different for having read the material? What do others have to say about the work? Additionally, consider how the book will be used: for whole group, small group, or individual reading, and be prepared to offer alternatives.

TCTELA shares the values put forth in NCTE's position paper "The Student's Right to Read," nevertheless we need to be informed and prepared for challenges in our schools, libraries, and classrooms. For information on preventing and combatting censorship, NCTE provides resources and advice at their *Intellectual Freedom Center*. If you are interested in the conversation around censorship both for and against, see *Censorship Bibliography* from the Center for Children's Literature at Bank Street College of Education or the *Annotated Bibliography* from the National Coalition Against Censorship.

evezehavi@gmail.com

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Movement in the elementary classroom

By Christina Janise McIntyre, PhD, Chair—Pre-Service Teacher Committee, with Stacia Miller, PhD, and Suzanne Lindt, PhD

Moving INTO the Classroom, a new text out this year by Springer Texts in Education, is an innovative interdisciplinary text targeting classroom teachers who want to increase engagement and learning by using innovative, differentiated approaches for students to gain conceptual understanding through movement. This text features chapters devoted to math, science, social studies and English language arts and reading. The physically active lessons throughout the text can be used in the classroom to introduce new information, apply or practice content, review information, or assess learning.

As part of a collaborative undergraduate research project, several experienced teachers teamed with education students from various disciplines at a state university to create a practitioner's textbook on movement/physical activity integration in the elementary classroom. Students were paired with mentors and created discipline-specific chapters to include in the text. Two chapters are dedicated to each subject, with an initial chapter consisting of current discipline-specific movement integration research and sample activities and an additional chapter with several standards-based lesson plans for use in the elementary classroom.

Additional chapters were included that explain the benefits of movement in the classroom, strategies to overcome the barriers

when integrating movement, and a chapter with suggestions for managing a physically active environment. Examples in the language arts chapters include using hula-hoops to teach prepositional phrases, a game of hot potato to teach parts of a story, a paired maze to teach listening and speaking, choral reading activities to promote fluency, and metacognitive strategies to foster vocabulary acquisition. All activities in the text utilize movement to boost conceptual understanding and higher order thinking in addition to increasing student engagement. The text is meant to serve as a guide and a springboard for inspiring teachers to integrate movement in their classes.

christina.mcintyre@mwsu.edu



NCTE Presidential panel: reimagining the canon with other affiliates

By Kelly Tummy, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

Jocelyn Chadwick, president of NCTE, assembled scholars from across the country to discuss how the literary canon is or is not engaging Generation Z. The scholars on the panel ranged from professors and researchers at the post-secondary level to teachers from the Houston area as well as many other states, and TCTELA was well represented.

Discussion began with how teachers of literature actually view the canon and its relevance. Jeanette Toomer from Medgar Evers College gave a resounding charge for more diversity in the canon and was well-echoed by many on the panel. Her examples from her courses showed not only a more diverse look at the canon but a more inclusive one that engaged learners consistently. Dixie Keyes from ACTE (Arkansas Council Teachers of English) and Arkansas State University led another part of the discussion about the strength in building text sets that engage more learners. Not only do these text sets reflect strong connections to the canon, they consistently demonstrate how the canon has been growing with more inclusiveness.

Ashlee Meredith, president-elect from VATE, (Virginia Association of Teachers of English) discussed more ways teachers can be advocates in their classrooms not only for creating a broader understating of the canon but also encouraged teachers to reimagine what texts we consider part of the canon.

Panelists were not only incredibly representative of the many affiliates of NCTE (National Council Teachers of English) but created a national discussion about a part of language arts teaching that runs deep throughout discussions country-wide.

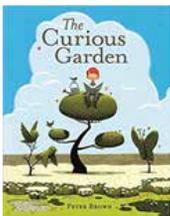
ktummy@hcde-texas.org



Early childhood spotlight: Perseverance

By Ameila Hewitt, Chair, TCTELA Early Childhood Committee

Like adults, young children often feel overwhelmed with life's challenges. What better way to help children feel empowered than by sharing great stories that connect the message of perseverance? Below are a few books that can help you do that. Remember: "Sometimes what your students need most has nothing to do with what's on your lesson plan." —*Unknown*



The Curious Garden

Written and Illustrated By: Peter Brown

Ages: 3–6; Fiction

The story begins by describing a city where everyone stays indoors. Liam wanders outside and discovers plants near a railway. He decides to take care of them. They begin to develop into a garden. Through his care the garden thrives. Winter arrives, and Liam steadfastly prepares for spring throughout the winter months. Spring arrives and the garden, with a little love from Liam, begins to expand throughout the city, transforming it into a lush, green world.

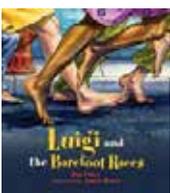


The Most Magnificent Thing

Written and Illustrated by: Ashley Spires

Ages: 3–7; Fiction

This picture book is about an unnamed girl and her very best friend, a dog. She has an idea to make the most magnificent thing! Making her magnificent thing is anything but easy, and the girl tries and fails, repeatedly. The girl's friend, her dog, convinces her to take a walk, and comes back to her project with renewed enthusiasm.



Luigi and the Barefoot Races

Written By: Dan Paley

Illustrated By: Aaron Boyd

Ages: 6–8; Fiction

Luigi lives on Regent Street in Philadelphia. He runs faster than anyone and has ever lost a race. Neighbors would gather on front stoops to watch him run. Luigi always ran barefoot. He had one great challenge—a race nobody thought he could win, not even Luigi himself. Set in the summer in a neighborhood in Philadelphia, the story takes the reader back to a time when neighbors visited, and children played in the streets in a summer that seemed like it would never end.

HewittA@uhd.edu

Nonfiction books: The best of the world in pictures

By Kim Pinkerton, Past President

While many teachers love to read and recommend fictional texts, there is evidence that nonfiction texts fall victim to neglect in classrooms (Goodwin & Miller, 2012/2013). Why do students and teachers struggle to engage with nonfiction texts at rates as high as fiction? Is it a perception of nonfiction as dry and boring? "...[N]onfiction doesn't have to be boring. On the contrary, allowing students to explore and pursue their interests within a broad array of informational texts can help them to see that the real world can often be just as surprising and intriguing as make-believe" (Goodwin & Miller, 2012/2013, p. 82). The challenge, of course, is finding the right nonfiction texts to engage readers with their world.

One of the most exciting parts of the Children's Book Awards Luncheon at this year's NCTE Annual Convention was the announcement of the 2018 Orbis Pictus Award winner and honorees. This book award, first given by NCTE in 1990, is named for the book *Orbis Pictus* (1658) by John Amos Comenius, which roughly represents the world in pictures. NCTE bestows this award each year to honor children's nonfiction books. Much is considered when selecting the one winner and short list of honorees, including accuracy, design, appeal, timeliness, and much more. This list of outstanding nonfiction books published in 2017 provides teachers with excellent selections to add to their classrooms.

The 2018 list of winners consists of several books for children that look at the incredible cultural history of the United States. *Chef Roy Choi and the Street Food Remix*, by Jacqueline Briggs Martin and illustrated by Man One, brings Los Angeles to the readers' fingertips. Martin masterfully brings to life the beautiful flavors of Choi's Korean-remix street food, as well as his love for the people and neighborhoods of the city. To add to the authenticity of this text, Man One provides colorful and lively illustrations reminiscent of L.A.'s street art. *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, by Susan Goldman Rubin, provides a beautiful photo-essay for children that highlights the history of African American quilt making, specifically those made by the women of Gee's Bend. The book is a stunning display of art and the stories that inspired these masterpieces.

Staying with a focus on the history of the United States, another section of notable Orbis Pictus books focuses on American history and geology. In *Her Right Foot*, by Dave Eggers and illustrated by Shawn Harris, readers meet a lovely lady who, arguably, has the biggest foot in the country. Who is it? It is Lady Liberty, of course. Eggers and Harris present a playful piece that explores a seemingly simple question. Why is she taking a step forward? Readers learn that her big, right foot is in the process of moving for a very important reason. *Dazzle Ships: World War I and the Art of Confusion*, by Chris Barton and illustrated by Victo Ngai, explores the unusual history behind the artistic design of war ships. Why were they so eye-catching? It turns out that these works of art caused more than a little confusion for the Germans. Barton and Ngai's work broaches an intriguing topic that is sure to captivate young readers.

Grand Canyon, by Jason Chin, is the 2018 winner of the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children. This text is a wonderful informational book about one of the United States' natural geologic marvels. The illustrations are stunning, and the factual details are abundant. Chin masterfully places all of this within a story-like narrative.

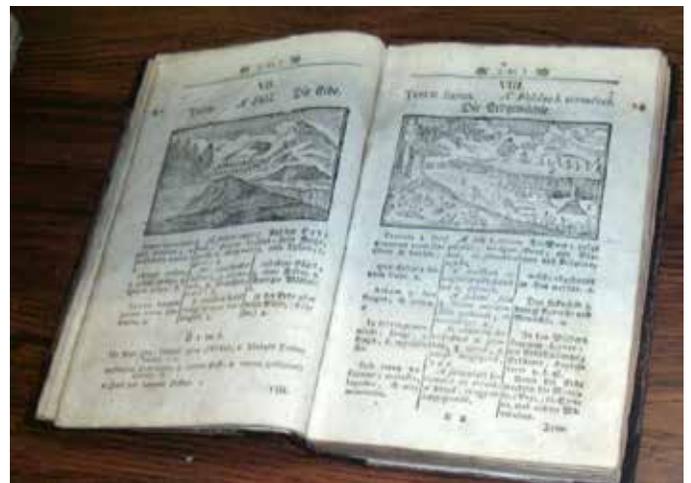
To close out the list, *The World is Not a Rectangle: A Portrait of Architect Zaha Hadid*, by Jeanette Winter, is one of the few books for children that touch on the lives of Muslim women. Winter brings to life the story of one Muslim woman who dreams of designing beautiful buildings across the world. This engaging story brings readers into her trials and triumphs.

There are so many great nonfiction text selections available for children. While this is just a small picture of the 2018 Orbis Pictus selections, the complete list and past winners and honorees can be found through NCTE at <http://www2.ncte.org/awards/orbis-pictus-award-nonfiction-for-children>. Take the time to explore all of these, and then be inspired to discover more of the wonderful nonfiction books that are available to help students explore their world in pictures.

kim.pinkerton@tamuc.edu

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A late 18th-century reprint of *Orbis Pictus*.

Books in verse: a GREAT read over the break

By Kelly Tummy, Vice President for Membership and Affiliates

Books in verse have long been a popular format, but the variety of topics and subjects now seem to fit every reader in classes today. While *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins is still a teen favorite, Jacqueline Woodson never ceases to engage readers with books like *Brown Girl Dreaming* and *Locomotion*, both books in verse. Kwame Alexander has enthralled young readers with *The Crossover* and *The Playbook* in recent years, and it seems books in verse are getting more traction in the classroom. More readers are responding well to this genre, and it is a good-fit genre for a struggling reader who may be intimidated by all that print on a page of a book told in traditional prose. Here are some favorites that have been the “just right” book to hand to students over the past few years.



Saving Red

Written by Sonya Sones

This book hits so many pressure points that students are reluctant to talk about—anxiety, first love, friendship, homelessness, and even PTSD—and the frame story of needed community service hours to “fulfill a school requirement” will ring true with many students. The book in verse is a perfect genre for this narrative as Molly suffers from anxiety, so the readers gets quips of her thoughts and her actions in these brief poems while still reading a fulfilling narrative. As they pick through each poem, readers begin to see the layers not only of the narrative but also of Molly’s mixed up and difficult life. What Sones does is exciting to read on each page. Through the poems, we find Molly’s struggles with a missing sibling, absent parents and drug abuse, as well as a mesmerizing connection to a homeless girl named Red. Enjoy this read over the holiday break, and find a student who needs to read this book to know everyone is struggling with something.



Solo

Written by Kwame Alexander

Do you feel like your family is the only misfit bunch around? Blade can’t seem to escape an embarrassing father—a rock and roll has-been—the memory of a mother who used to hold the family together, and siblings who think he must belong elsewhere. This narrative in verse takes place not only in the limelight of the rock and roll scene of Hollywood but also on the continent of Africa in the country of Ghana as Blade treks across an ocean to find another part of himself. Told with song titles and lyrics throughout the poems and his father’s hit-list of the best rock and roll songs across decades, students will find the narrative sadly true as characters mourn lost teenage love, but also redemptive and inspiring as Blade finds his place in his confusing teenage world.



5 to 1

Written by Holly Boger

A compelling blend of prose and poetry, alternating viewpoints and a dystopian Indian culture story. Sudasa and Kiran have plans other than to become husband and wife, especially as teenagers. But as India has perfected gender selection of infants in the year 2054, females have become an incredibly valuable asset. Sudasa’s narrative is told in poetry and Kiran’s is told in prose. This blend not only allows for specific gender roles and norms to surface, it allows readers to grasp how different reluctance, frustration, and pain are if you are a boy in the contest or a girl who has to sit by and watch her life become someone else’s to construct.

ktummy@hcde-texas.org

From the blogosphere...

Fill your tank with loads of instructional ideas at:
<http://twowritingteachers.org>

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The truth in humor: Tackling poignant themes in children's literature

By Kim Pinkerton, Past President

Five notable authors captivated attendees at the 2017 NCTE Annual Convention with their conversations about the role that humor plays in children's literature. While those present for this one-hour session may have come looking for slapstick comedy, what they found were serious conversations sprinkled with a few laughs and smiles. Nikki Grimes, Mac Barnett, Jon Klassen, Yuyi Morales, and Dan Santat tackled the very critical topic of the healing force of children's literature with a slight twist—added humor.

Award-winning author and poet, Grimes opened the session by highlighting the more traditional role of humor in children's literature. Her face lit up as she mused about how readers love a “laugh aloud story,” one that is good for “tickling the funny bone.” Dan Santat, the 2018 winner of the Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Children's Fiction for *After the Fall*, amused attendees with his take on *potty* humor. When writing about vomit in children's literature, Santat acknowledged that he has found a classy way to do it.

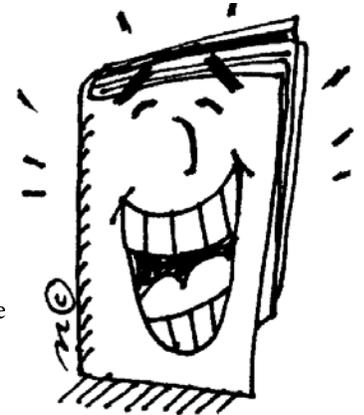
Jon Klassen and Mac Barnett, decorated children's book authors, playfully bantered with each other, drawing delightful chuckles from those in attendance. However, even Klassen and Barnett, two kids at heart, shared their more serious side as they dove into the true topic at hand. They talked about the fact that kids ask big questions...about life and death. Klassen noted that “what humor does best is that it [helps readers] understand that we all have the same questions about life.” Mac talked about how stories are useful for confronting such topics, and picture books are the perfect vehicles for humor. The two are an ideal marriage.

Moving even deeper into the session's aim, Grimes shared that, as an author, “it's [her] responsibility to touch the human heart. The trick [is] to incorporate humor so that readers [can] breathe during the dark passages.” Morales, winner of the Pura Belpré and Randolph Caldecott awards, shared that she is able to use humor to help readers “get along with their fears.” Her words were quite eloquent. Humor is the thread that can be woven to ease the burden of a difficult topic.

These authors of books for young children do not shy away from writing about topics like rule beaking, poverty, death, etc. Research too supports the beneficial role of humor in these types of stories. Zbaracki (2003) studied elementary students

and found that these readers had an awareness of the relationship between humor and coping mechanisms. Readers talked about its ability to change their emotions and help them deal with difficult situations. “Humor has great value in our daily lives, but especially the lives of children. Both readers and authors articulate this importance of humor in our lives” (Zbaracki, 2003, p. 107).

Humor in children's literature lightens the burden for the reader while still allowing for safe contemplation of some of life's most challenging moments. Here are just a few children's literature titles that deftly infuse humor and critical life issues:



- *The Wolf, the Duck, and the Mouse* by Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen (2017)
- *I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen (2011)
- *Rules of the House* by Mac Barnett and Matt Myers (2016)
- *After the Fall* (How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again) by Dan Santat (2017)
- *Almost Zero: A Dyamonde Daniel Book* by Nikki Grimes (2017)
- *Rudas: Niño's Horrendous Hermanitas* by Yuyi Morales (2016)

kim.pinkerton@tamuc.edu

References:

Zapata, A., Barnett, M., Grimes, N., Klassen, J., Martinez, M., Morales, Y., O'Neal, S., & Santat, D. (2017, November). *Recapturing our shared voices: Humor and play as a healing force in children's literature*. Session presented at the 2017 NCTE Annual Convention, St. Louis, MO.

Zbaracki, M. D. (2003). *A descriptive study of how humor in literature serves to engage children in their reading*. (Electronic Thesis or Dissertation). Retrieved from <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>

Texas Council of Teachers
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Conference Speakers:

Fueling Our Fires to Thrive as Teachers:

An Energy Exploration

Friday:
Anne Goudvis
Alfred Tatum
Leah Ames
Gravity Goldberg
Guadalupe Garcia McCall
Jocelyn Chadwick

Saturday:
Pernille Ripp
Kathi Appelt
Cynthia Smith
Deborah Mouton

Sunday:
Jan Burkins
Kim Yaris
Chris Lehman

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

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Theme: Fueling Our Fires to Thrive as Teachers

Manuscript Deadline: April 1, 2018

Column Deadline: May 1, 2018

Call for Submissions: The 2018 conference theme is “Fueling Our Fires to Thrive as Teachers: An Energy Exploration.” Teaching is hard work, and every one of us knows that. We spend time trying to find just the right lesson for a standard we want to teach that will engage our students. We spend time trying to figure out which of those books in our classroom library will be the perfect fit for the one student who hasn’t engaged in reading yet. We spend time reading our students’ writing and giving them constructive feedback. And sometimes, there just doesn’t seem to be enough time to get it all done! Not only are we fighting to find the time to get it all done, we are also fighting to make sure that our voices are heard—in our schools, our districts, at the state level, and at the national level as well.

Don Graves, in his book *The Energy to Teach*, talks about the emotional roller coaster that teachers experience every day. He writes, “At times you will be second-guessed by parents, administrators, and pundits who have never taught. Laws will be passed that try to govern the teaching transactions you make with children” (p. 2). This emotional roller coaster he talks about drains our energy and makes it harder to be effective in our roles.

How do we combat the draining effect that all of this has upon our professional and personal lives? Graves would tell us that first we have to account for our time and energy and decide which activities gives us energy, which activities take energy away, and which activities are neutral. He would next instruct us to look at those things that take energy away and come up with a plan to make them into energy gains. Can we do this? Certainly we can! However, there are some strategies that might make this a little easier.

Networking and making connections across our schools, districts, and states is one way to make it easier. Broad connections help, but finding that one colleague, according to Graves, is also a benefit and a way to find more energy in your teaching. Meenoo Rami, in her book *Thrive*, provides many other ideas for helping to stay energized in your teaching, from finding connections, to listening to yourself, and even to keeping your work challenging! In her book *Conversations*, Regie Routman reminds us that in order to be professionals, we have to challenge ourselves not only in our professional lives, but in our personal lives. She writes that, “Without interests and time spent in activities and endeavors we love, our focus becomes pretty narrow.” We have to be more than one-dimensional for our students. If we aren’t interesting people, they aren’t going to be interested in our classrooms!

So we invite you to explore the ways in which you find the energy to be fully present in your teaching. What are your interests that enrich your teaching? What activities give you energy? How do you take activities that might be energy drains and turn them into energy gains? How do you find connections with colleagues, in your school and beyond the school walls? How do these connections impact your teaching?

We encourage you to think about these questions, and we invite interested individuals to submit manuscripts, conceptual, pedagogical, research-based, and theoretical, as related to this topic of “Fueling Our Fires to Thrive as Teachers.” Please refer to the *English in Texas* website for manuscript submission guidelines. Do not hesitate to contact the editorial team at 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 “Fueling Our Fires to Thrive as Teachers.” The below descriptions detail each column as well as provide information for contacting the editorial team regarding your column idea. Please query the editorial team **BEFORE** submitting your full column.

The columns to be published in the Spring/Summer Issue:

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.

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.