

TEXAS VOICES



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

President's
Corner

Looking back, looking ahead

By Margaret Hale, President

Welcome to 2017, fellow English teachers! I am privileged to serve you this year as the TCTELA President. We have all had a busy year, full of highs and lows, and I'd like to use this column to share some of what TCTELA has accomplished in the past year in service to our membership.

Last year in this column, Kim Pinkerton shared with you all that TCTELA had been doing to support the revision of the ELAR/SLAR TEKS (Pinkerton, 2016, p. 2). That work continued in 2016, and we are nearing the end of the process. Members of the leadership team for TCTELA engaged in numerous face-to-face meetings, phone conferences, and email communications with representatives from seven other literacy organizations across the state, as well as with members of the Texas State Board of Education, to continue providing commentary and making suggestions for continued revision of the proposed TEKS. We worked to ensure your voices were heard by hosting Forum 2.0 on the TCTELA website to capture comments and concerns about the proposed TEKS and then sharing the feedback with the State Board of Education via a report delivered by Victoria Young.

All of this work on the proposed TEKS culminated with the SBOE meetings on January 31-February 3, 2017. At this meeting, the Board heard and accepted and/or rejected the many suggested amendments to the proposed TEKS and ultimately accepted the K-8 TEKS for first reading. First reading of the English I-IV proposed TEKS will occur at the April SBOE meeting, as will second reading of the K-8 TEKS. You can watch TEA's website as well as the TCTELA website for updates on the process. Know that public commentary will be available for the K-8 proposed TEKS via the Texas Register at some point after February 20th. I encourage you to take this opportunity to read and share feedback, and make your voice heard!

In November of 2016, members of the TCTELA board attended NCTE's annual convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Past president, Kim Pinkerton, president elect Diane Miller, and I had the opportunity to share the work we have done with our membership over the past 18 months to work on the TEKS revision process. We shared our activities with three different groups of English educators in a round table format. Many of the participants were interested in how we have worked to collaborate with other literacy organizations across the state as well as build relationships with members of the State Board of Education to help further our cause. Former board member, Valerie Taylor, also participated in this round table session and spoke about our work with Literacy Education/Advocacy Day.

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And then in January, we hosted our annual conference in Fort Worth at the Renaissance Worthington Fort Worth. Over 700 of you attended and spent the weekend learning from nationally-known speakers Colby Sharp, John Schumacher, Penny Kittle, Jocelyn Chadwick, Matt Glover and Jeffrey Wilhelm. You also got to learn from 2015 National Teacher of the Year, Shanna Peeples, and renowned children's and young adult authors Sharon Draper and Neal Shusterman. In addition, almost 50 concurrent sessions offered participants the chance to see their lives through literature. Finally, Karin Miller and Brad Vasil, both of the Texas Education Agency provided participants with updates on curriculum standards and STAAR assessments.

Congratulations go out to Victoria Young, the 2017 recipient of the Edmund J. Farrell Lifetime Service Award from TCTELA, Jocelyn Chadwick, president elect of NCTE, 2017 recipient of the TCTELA Mercedes Bonner Award, Laura Hamilton of Aldine ISD, 2017 recipient of the TCTELA Elementary Teacher of the Year award, Traci Teaff, Schleicher County ISD, 2017 recipient of the TCTELA Middle School Teacher of the Year award, and Nicole Benke, Katy ISD, 2017 recipient of the TCTELA High School Teacher of the Year award. Thank you all for your hard work and dedication to the profession and to students!

We look forward to seeing you all on Galveston Island, January 26-28, 2018, where we will gather for our 2018 annual conference. The conference theme is Fueling Our Fires to Thrive as Teachers: An Energy Exploration. Be thinking about how you work to thrive as a teacher, and consider submitting a presentation proposal for the 2018 conference. The proposals are now open at www.tctela.org. We want to hear your voices! grithale@aol.com

References:

Pinkerton, K. (2016, Spring). Reflections: Seeing the possibilities as readers, teachers, advocates. *Texas Voices*, 29(1), p. 2, 3.

From the blogosphere...

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

...to the website

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

Executive secretary message

By Katrina Gonzales

For those members who attended the January 2017 TCTELA Conference in Fort Worth, thank you for being an integral part of your organization. As we rushed off to grab a chair in one of the many thought-provoking workshops, motivating general sessions, or energizing luncheons, each of us was supporting the future of our organization by the synergy created by our presence and the connections we made. As I stated in my Executive Secretary report on Saturday of the conference:

Healthy conference attendance = A healthy and balanced budget

Maybe a lesser-known factor in creating a healthier organization is the importance of serving in a leadership capacity. If you have attended the TCTELA Conference for a number of years, you have most certainly experienced the impact this vibrant organization has had on your own classroom. Possibilities abound to help you share with others what TCTELA has done for you.

Many of you discovered a particular committee to join. Others attended the Rising Leaders event on Saturday evening. Still more of you probably wondered how you might become more involved in TCTELA.

Some opportunities to consider include:

- Serving on a committee either as a member or a chairperson;
- Running for an officer position on the board next year;
- Submitting a workshop proposal present at next year's conference; and
- Volunteering to help at next year's conference.

Find your niche in the TCTELA leadership. We cannot wait to have you join us!

katgonmom@gmail.com

Pre-service Teachers: TCTELA provides professional development opportunity

By Christina Janise McIntyre, PhD, Emily Reeves, PhD, Daphney Curry, PhD Midwestern State University

One of the missions of the Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts is to provide professional development for teachers to advance the literacy growth of students in our state. Not only does TCTELA provide support, resources, and professional development opportunities for in-service teachers, the council also takes the development of pre-service language arts teachers seriously as well. This is evident in the opportunity TCTELA provides pre-service teachers to join the organization at a student rate. Further, the council funds a grant for pre-service teachers to attend the annual conference and attend sessions that will help them grow as professionals, developing a network of experienced in-service teachers for support and guidance.

Thanks to Dr. Diane Miller, the 2017 TCTELA annual conference, Reflections: Seeing Life through Literature, had another amazing group of young pre-service teacher volunteers. Hailing mostly from the Houston area, these 12 girls traveled to the Fort Worth Worthington Renaissance to volunteer at the annual conference. Their contributions helped make the annual event run seamlessly.

Each of these pre-service teachers applied for the TCTELA pre-service grant in which they wrote a competitive essay and submitted letters of recommendation. As part of the grant award, their registration and accommodations were paid. Their assistance at the conference was invaluable as they volunteered two half days and one full day from early morning to late night helping attendees register, find rooms, facilitate sessions,

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Kim Pinkerton, now Past President, shares insights into her work as president.

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attend to speaker needs, and handle audio-visual technical issues. Additionally, one conference day they were able to be an attendee, going to sessions and workshops to develop as future professionals. The students were ecstatic about attending the workshops, talking with other professionals and collecting resources for their future classrooms.

Several of the pre-service teachers were even able to spend

time with ELA/R rock stars like Penny Kittle and authors like Neal Shusterman, who has authored such popular young adult books as *Unwind*, *Everlost*, and *Everwild*. Attendees and speakers alike have complimented the volunteers on their professionalism, helpfulness, and hospitality. The future of the language arts classroom looks bright with preservice teachers like these.

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2017 TCTELA Conference Photos



Sharon Draper, author of *Stella by Starlight*, and Jocelyn Chadwick, NCTE president-elect.



Jeff Anderson, author of the *Zack de la Cruz* series, talks reading and writing.



Special thanks to State Board of Ed. District 11 rep. Pat Hardy for answering questions about TEKS revisions with President-elect Diane Miller.



TCTELA members plan their schedules for the conference.



New books are a great reason to smile!



Victoria Young accepting the Edmund J Farrell Lifetime Achievement Award from Margaret Hale.



TCTELA members can't get enough of Neal Shusterman.



One of the best parts of the conference is time to talk to colleagues and share ideas.



Taking some time to relax and have a little fun.



English teachers are a stylish bunch!



Congratulations to TCTELA Elementary Teacher of the Year Laura Hamilton from Aldine ISD.



Jocelyn Chadwick, president-elect of NCTE and Margaret Hale, president of TCTELA.



Penny Kittle signing books.



Congratulations to TCTELA High School Teacher of the Year Nicole Benke from Katy ISD.

Words or actions

Shona Rose, Vice-President Elect, and Roni Burren, editorial team, *Voices in Texas*

When Shona was growing up in Amarillo, her mother surprised her with the revelation that her 3rd grade teacher was not white. Unbelieving, Shona marched her skinny legs back to the school to confront her teacher. “My momma says that you’re black.” (That’s the language we used back then, if you remember the 60’s.) She continued, “I told her she was lyin’ ‘bout you!” The teacher grinned, chuckled, and taught Shona another lesson. “Honey, your momma is right. I *am* black. But that doesn’t really matter in third grade, does it?”

Most organizations have language in their bylaws about persons of color and underrepresented populations. TCTELA does. Do those words change our actions? At the committee leadership event at the conference, Roni and Shona met two timid, yet articulate and passionate women of color. They didn’t have an invitation to attend the reception, but they took a risk to seek out

those in leadership about how they could become involved. Of course they were welcomed, but perhaps we should be reminded of our responsibility and the moral imperative to seek out *and* develop those teachers and leaders who can serve the changing demographic needs of our state and our organization.

Roni remembers an analogy presented by a relative, “I am never unaware of being a woman. When I wake, I have specific garments that define my gender. There are cycles and activities only a woman enjoys.” To those who are minorities in attendance at our conference, surrounded by faces and cultures so unlike theirs, are they ever *unaware* of their differences? And as professionals, our actions do matter: encouraging and welcoming the contributions of those who can enrich our calling and service to Texas students. Shona.rose@esc16.net; rburren@uh.edu

Enhancing literacy diversity

By Eve Zehavi, editorial team *English in Texas*

Typically, I go to conferences as much to socialize with my own cadre as I do to attend meetings and presentations. For me, this year the TCTELA conference in Fort Worth was different. As a new member of the editorial team for *English in Texas* and a representative on the board, I was tasked with being a participant across the entire spectrum of activities from presentations to committee meetings to author signings, so I experienced a level of engagement that went beyond any that I have encountered. As a neophyte on the board, I was comforted by the warmth, generosity and collegiality that I experienced. I was impressed by the number of teachers who offered me their time and expertise, who shared stories of their classrooms and commiserated with me about our mutual struggles. I met new colleagues engaged in all levels of literacy education and many with areas of interest very different from my own. Among these educators, it was my pleasure to meet Sue Hurt, chairman of the Bilingual and ESL Awareness committee.

In our conversation I was struck by the parallels that exist between meeting the needs of English Language Learners and meeting the needs of new readers, my own area of focus. Both require similar scaffolding and support. Both demand an understanding of the value of oral language and the implementation of both listening and speaking, skills for which we often have little time because of the reading and writing focus of our standardized testing. While Sue supports secondary

teachers and I work in emergent literacy it is important to recognize the impact ELLs have on the teaching of English language arts across all grade levels and throughout our state. Language diversity in our classrooms is growing at a rapid pace. According to the National Center for Education Statistics the nationwide average of public school students whose first language is not English, is 9%. In the state of Texas, that number increases to 15% statewide with some urban districts containing close to 30% non-native speakers of English. Moreover, demographic

projections indicate that the diversity of home languages spoken is also increasing. According to the most recent census, over 160 different languages are spoken in Texas schools. These students come to us not only with cognitive and linguistic needs but

cultural and sociological needs as well. Our mission as English language professionals is to promote literacy, support our students, and help them navigate the “intertwined” realms of the “word and the world.” (Freire, 1987)

The Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *English in Texas* will be focused on concerns and contributions related to the teaching of English Language Learners. We all can benefit from knowing what you have learned about ELLs in the context of your classrooms and lessons, what research and resources have informed your practice, and what scaffolds you are using to help students become English language proficient. What affective considerations, such as



WE'RE ALL IN
THIS TOGETHER.

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attitudes, learning styles and motivations are significant in your teaching of ELL students? How are you working to meet the needs of all learners such as students from diverse cultural backgrounds, refugees, and undocumented students? How are you engaging the families of your students? If you have a story or strategy, challenge, or concern to share on this timely and important topic please consider contributing to this upcoming issue. Interested

individuals are encouraged to submit manuscripts, conceptual, pedagogical, research-based, and theoretical related to the teaching of English Language Learners. As I experienced at our recent conference, we are among a wonderful group of teachers, gifted and committed to literacy, and we want to hear from you. evzehavi@gmail.com

Rock the classroom with authors

By Katrina Gonzales, Executive Secretary

Maybe rock and roll isn't a favorite of the vast number of students in our classrooms anymore, and this metaphor may even push the limits with many young teachers. Nonetheless, when I consider the impact young adult authors have had on my classroom, the closest description I can summon is a rock concert.

Like many teachers of literature, I have felt that authors are pedestal material, placed somewhere between humans and gods. After all, they are the creators of story, the magic which hooks and holds our students like nothing else we can bring to the classroom as ELA/R teachers.

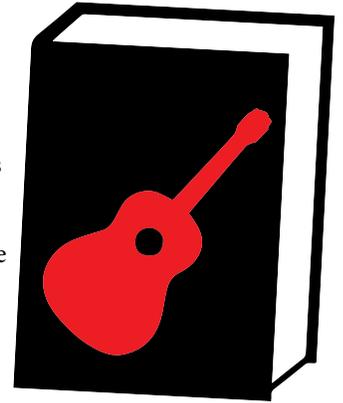
After several awkward conversations and going a bit "fan girl" over authors I have had the privilege to meet (extreme example: tripping over a rolling case to get an autograph and landing smack into the back of the guileless Jeffrey Wilhelm), I have since had the pleasure of connecting with authors in order to bring them into my classroom. Authors do not belong on that pedestal I placed them on in my earlier years; they need us and our student readers as much as we need them.

Some schools, particularly urban and suburban schools, find it fairly effortless to partner with a neighboring school to bring in an author for a few days and for several different sessions. For many rural schools, however, bringing the author physically to the school proves to be more difficult with the issue of travel if the location is remote. Also, in any location, the issue of finances may be prohibitive to author visits if the school has limited funding. Nevertheless, the accessibility of the internet makes bringing authors to our students less of a challenge than it was previously in all settings.

My personal journey with authors started with follow-up emails after conferences, "friending" the authors on social media sites, and encouraging students to reach out to authors as well. I have experienced a myriad of author contacts from email replies, Google Hangouts visits, an opportunity for my students to read an up-and-coming YA author's first manuscript, and gifts of books from the authors to individual students or the whole classroom. As stated earlier, children's, middle grades, and young adults' authors need us---the students as their audience and the teachers as their promoters. This reciprocal and invigorating relationship stimulates the learning environment in an English language arts and Reading classroom.

After the January 2017 TCTELA Conference, authors

e. E. Charlton-Trujillo and C. G. Watson wandered out to my West Texas school in rural West Texas. Neither our middle school or high school had experienced an author visit in over 19 years. Sixth graders worked after school to create a parking area festooned with a banner and signs that stated "Write This Way." The day of the visit, these same enthusiastic students showed up at school at 6:30 am to attach balloons to the fence behind the parking spot.



The high school students created an enormous welcome banner in their visual arts classes. They created posters regarding writing and reading in the English classes which lined the high school hallways.

In these students' minds, having authors in their school was tantamount to a rock star visiting.

After the visit, students wrote thank-you letters to the authors and the high school principal who made the visit possible. The impact the authors' visits had on the students is apparent in these quotes from the various letters:

"I believe I could become a writer one day but I lacked the motivation and having you here helped light a spark in me."

"You made me feel like my story is important. ...I felt like no one wanted to hear what I had to say. Eventually, everyone will know _____'s story. I have you to thank for that."

"You gave me really good advice on my 'writer's block' when you said that it doesn't exist. I didn't believe it at first, but, when we did those writing exercises, my words just flowed on my paper."

Hopefully, the schools in Eldorado will not wait another twenty years to host another author visit. The impact on students in the reading and writing classroom as well as on their lives in general is too powerful to dismiss. If you would like more information about ways to host an author in your school, please feel free to contact me. katgonmom@gmail.com



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The killer kids of *Scythe*: A new tale by Neal Shusterman

By Kim Pinkerton, Past President

On Friday, January 20, 2017, attendees at the 52nd Annual TCTELA conference were privileged to hear Neal Shusterman speak at the luncheon. Shusterman shared stories of how he began storytelling as a counselor at a summer camp for boys and of how he developed the ideas for the 2015 National Book Award winner, *Challenger Deep*, and the best-selling *Unwind* Dystology. Shusterman also introduced attendees to the newly released *Scythe*.

Scythe, winner of the 2017 Printz Honor Award, is set in the future where the iCloud has become the Thunderhead. This apparatus of artificial intelligence has corrected all of the problems of the world, including natural and accidental death. Without death to control the population of the world, a select group of citizens, called Scythes, has been tasked with killing people. While the killing appears to be random and compassionate at first glance, there is something much more sinister bubbling just beneath the surface.

Scythe opens as readers are introduced to two teens who are ultimately selected as Scythe apprentices. Under the tutelage of

Scythe Faraday, Citra and Rowan learn the art of killing with compassion. When an unexpected change in their apprenticeship occurs, they learn that not all Scythes are created equal, and with the Scythes being outside of the omnipotent control of the Thunderhead, no rules apply. Citra and Rowan must navigate the murky and dangerous waters of the Scythedom, as they learn to kill and as they fight for the one open Scythe position available. Most intriguing is the fact that the consequence of losing the position as Scythe is death at the hand of the other apprentice.

Shusterman has created another fantastical world where the impossible seems to be happening right in front of average people. He masterfully infuses just enough truth into the implausible to make readers believers. To find out just how deep the Scythe corruption goes and why the apprentices were suddenly thrust into a battle against each other, read *Scythe*. Kim.pinkerton@tamuc.edu

References:

Shusterman, N. (2016). *Scythe*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

From 50,000 to 50

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

The annual poetry night at the TCTELA conference this year was nothing short of mesmerizing...enthraling...compelling...inspiring...evocative. In a word, it was slammin'.

Joaquin Zihuatanejo traversed Texas twice to join our membership in a gripping celebration of poetry. First, he drove from his Dallas home to Austin. From the heady vantage point of the Capitol's steps, he revealed his heart and captivated the 50,000 participants at the Women Rising March. Next, he trekked from Austin to Fort Worth to join TCTELA for our Poetry Slam event, where he shared his poetic genius just as passionately and just as energetically with our group of 50. At both events, he debuted his work entitled, "An Open Letter from a Brown Writer to His Brown Daughters Who Both Dream of Writing." If you were unable to join us, the full text of his piece can be accessed [here](#), and his Austin performance can be viewed [here](#).

If social media comments are any indication, then Joaquin Zihuatanejo's time with us proved a rousing success and provided a challenging motivation. TCTELA members and guests who attended could not keep the excitement to themselves!

Consider the following reflections upon the event: Carrie G. posted on Facebook, "He will splinter your heart in a trillion

ways, but then carefully, lovingly, sacredly piece it back together." Stephanie R. wrote, "Never did I want to light my candle like I do now. Eternally grateful." In fact, Stephanie was one of the three University of Houston-Downtown student volunteers who bravely read their own original pieces to the group. Other participants chose to capture Joaquin Zihuatanejo's words verbatim. Katrina G. quoted, "Poetry is telling the awful truth in a beautiful way." TCTELA tweeted, "The questions are the core of the poem." To her Twitter followers, Brittany E. shared, "Silence yourself and the poem will find you."

The TCTELA Poetry Slam engaged us as readers, writers, and thinkers. We spent an evening immersed in poetic language and thought-provoking creativity. To quote Mr. Zihuatanejo, "@thepoetjz" himself: "The energy in that room that you all gave me carried me through that reading. I read poetry, an essay, a

short story, new things, old things, and you were all there with me in every way an audience can be." petersond@uhd.edu



Joaquin Zihuatanejo

A perspective on assessment

Kristen Nance, editor, *Texas Voices*

After seven years out of Texas, I returned to teaching in this great state in 2001. Feeling again like a new teacher instead of a ten-year veteran, I waded through my first English department meeting and an extensive analysis of charts, graphs, numbers, and percentages. I wondered if I was in the wrong room; but no, this was the analysis of the test results. “What test?” I asked. “The Test,” was the answer. In the last fifteen years, “The Test” has become even more deserving of its capital letters, taking over the craft of our profession, and threatening to turn us into nothing more than technicians in the classroom.

And then, I heard Victoria Young speak at a local conference. Seeing her title as the director of assessment at TEA, I expected to sit through another session of charts and graphs. Instead, I heard the charge that our job is to honor literacy journeys and ensure that our students can make meaning of the challenging text that is the world around them. In her acceptance of the Edmund J. Farrell Lifetime Achievement Award at the TCTELA

conference in January, Victoria reminded us that “assessments and rubrics are worthwhile only if they provide teachers and parents with meaningful information.” As director of assessment, she used her background as a teacher “who loved reading and writing, who understood the challenges and joys of daily life inside a classroom.”

This perspective is a good reminder for all of us as we approach the inevitable data analysis that will be so much a part of the assessment season. Remember “the perniciousness of formulas and test prep and practicing skills in isolation... and the value of instruction based on thinking and making connections.” Victoria reminded us again that for our students to be successful on the genre that is standardized testing, we must trust our craft, our content knowledge, and our compassion for our students. Teach them to think, and you teach them to test. Kristen.stapp@fortbendisd.com

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

Publication: English in Texas Volume 47.1 (SPRING/SUMMER)

Theme: REFLECTIONS: Seeing Life Through Literature

Call for Submissions Deadline: April 1, 2017 / **Column Deadline:** May 1, 2017

The 2017 TCTELA conference theme is “Reflections: Seeing Life Through Literature.” Over the past several years, the presence of nonfiction in our classrooms has risen swiftly, brought forward by several things including standards-based discussions centered around the College and Career Readiness standards, Common Core State Standards at the national level, and even the TEKS standards for English/Language Arts here in Texas. Bookshelves in our classrooms are more diversified, including engaging works of biography and informational text. The shift has been positive for our students because they need to learn how to be savvy consumers of information. However, we want to tread carefully to ensure we are not bulking up on information at the expense of literary fiction.

Castano and Kid, in their article entitled “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind,” reported that based on a study they conducted, people who read literary fiction, not nonfiction or popular fiction, showed quantifiable higher levels of theory of mind, otherwise known as empathetic capacity. Literature is a reflection of life; it helps us see who we are, who we can become, and it helps us to see people around us.

How do you use literary fiction in your classroom? How have your students grown through its use? How have you grown? What are some of the most powerful pieces of literary fiction that you have found? What makes them so powerful? What are some of the best ways you have found to engage your students with this type of literature?

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 “Reflections: Seeing Life Through Literature.” 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 “Reflections: Seeing Life Through Literature.” 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.

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.