## President's corner: Spend less time on checklists

By Kelly E. Tumy, TCTELA President

It feels like summer can be fraught with checklists: did I read that book I will use next year—check; did I remember to rest—check; did I spend time with family/friends—check; am I ready to head back to school—wait, not so fast! I wish more teachers would spend less time checking things off lists, (this is an admonition to myself) and spend more time with simply enjoying an opportunity to recharge, to attend some meaningful PD that perhaps you got to choose, and even just put the checklists aside and savor a morning cup of coffee.

We live our teaching lives by rosters, lists of school supplies, car-rider lists, lists of credits students need to graduate, so the list seems an integral part of who we are as educators. I ask you this fall, to take time for maybe some items on a list of your own. Take a yoga class, learn to knit, get better at photography, learn the ins and outs of container gardening, take in a local museum. Often, the art of self-care is lost on teachers, since we spend our lives taking care of the humans who arrive each day in our classes.

But for goodness sake, put the 2020 TCTELA conference on your to-do list for this January. In the coming days, you will see a stellar line-up of presenters from across the country who embody the theme: Vision and Voice: Raising the Literacy Volume in Texas. Check our Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts for speaker announcements, and please make plans to attend. This is one item I would love for you to KEEP on your lists.

Keep track of your accomplishments this year, lift each other up each day, and remember as we teach all children who enter our doorways that they are not something we simply check off the to-do list for the day. Pour into your students, walk in their shoes, be that one teacher who looks them in the eye and listens. Have a great 2019-2020 school year, and I will see you in Frisco in January!

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## CONTENTS

## Changes ahead for STAAR reading and writing exams

By Tracy Kriese, NCTE Affiliate Liaison

Legislation passed by the 86th Texas Legislature and signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott will result in significant changes to the STAAR assessment program.

House Bill 3906 requires that the separate writing tests for grades four and seven be administered for the last time during spring 2021. After that administration, writing standards will instead be assessed through the reading exam, which will be revised for grades three through eight to include writing questions. As the Texas Education Agency begins to develop a blueprint for the revised reading exams, decisions will be made as to the format of the added writing questions. Commissioner Mike Morath, speaking before the State Board of Education (SBOE) in June, explained that open-ended response questions are a possibility not only for the new reading and writing exam, but for all subject area exams. HB 3906 specifies that by 2022-2023, no more than 75% of any subject area test can be multiple choice.

House Bill 3906 also includes a provision allowing for the

**Changes ahead for STAAR reading and writing exams (continued)**

separation of each STAAR subject exam into as many as three separate, shorter sections. Although legislators supported this change by explaining that schools would be able to schedule those tests throughout the school year, making them more diagnostic in nature, Commissioner Morath clarified that STAAR would still be administered during a specified window at the end of a school year, with districts likely having some discretion as to how to configure that state testing window. A district might choose to administer a subject area test over three days back-to-back, or once a week for three weeks. Alternatively, a district could choose to follow the current model and administer all three segments in one long testing session on one day. TEA has no plans to administer these separate, shorter tests in school year 2019-2020, as the agency needs time to create and issue a new testing blueprint before implementing any changes.

In his remarks to the SBOE, Commissioner Morath also clarified conflicting reports about HB 3906 provisions regarding electronic assessments. The bill does not require that Texas begin administering its state assessments electronically by 2022, but it does require that TEA develop and submit a plan for statewide implementation of electronic assessments. Further legislative action would be needed before any such plan could be put into place.

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# Registration now open for NCTE annual convention

By Tracy Kriese, NCTE Affiliate Liaison

The 2019 National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention will be held November 21-24 in Baltimore, Maryland. This year's convention theme is Spirited Inquiry.

"When we gather in Baltimore in November 2019, let's inquire together," invites 2019 NCTE Annual Convention Program Chair Leah Zuidema. "Let's dare to wonder, to be bold and creative in our curiosity. Specifically, let's focus on the role that spirited inquiry plays in English, language arts, literacy, and composition. At our 2019 Convention, let's reawaken our own spirit of inquiry as teachers, leaders, writers, readers, and thinkers."

Featured speakers include Tonya Bolding and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., co-authors of *Dark Sky Rising;* Meg Medina, award-winning author of *Merci Suárez Changes Gears;* Tommy Orange, the author of *There There;* and Tara Westover, author of *Educated.* NCTE President Franki Sibberson will also address the convention.

All sessions and events will be held at the Baltimore Convention Center. Pre-convention workshops and special events take place November 21 and November 25–26. For a complete list of convention speakers and other convention details, see *http://convention.ncte.org/*.

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# Rounding up the roundtables

By Diane M. Miller, Ph.D., Past President, and Kim Pinkerton, Ed.D.

Soon after the current year's conference concludes, TCTELA conference planners begin preparing for all aspects of the next annual conference, always keeping in mind the reasons teachers attend these events. According to Jalongo and Machado (2016), educators have the following goals for conference attendance: a) to keep up to date, b) to build expertise, and c) to advance professionally (pp. 3-4). Everything from procuring keynote speakers to negotiating the hotel contract to advertising on social media to writing speaker introductions must be addressed with a spirit of service and excellence.

Way back in the fall of 2015, TCTELA President-Elect Kim Pinkerton was tasked with reviewing proposals for the 2016 concurrent sessions, so she invited several TCTELA members to join her in this task. Diane Miller, that year's Vice President-Elect for Membership and Affiliates, accepted the invitation. Each year, the President-Elect leads the review of more than 100 proposals for fewer than 50 session spots, and it is never an easy job.

## Creation of TCTELA Roundtables

Not unlike previous years or years since, the 2016 Proposal Review Team faced a daunting task. How to choose? TCTELA members are brilliant, and they always meet the challenge of writing many, many brilliant proposals in hopes of sharing that brilliance. Kim and Diane, both working as university faculty members, opted to create roundtable sessions (see Figure 1), mimicking a typical format used at higher-education research conferences. Although the roundtable format had appeared sporadically at past TCTELA conferences, it was by no means a regular fixture.

The decision to create roundtable sessions, where some focused on practice and some on research, enabled Kim, and the presidents-elect who followed her, to reap two major benefits for TCTELA members who submit proposals. First, combining six to eight related proposals into one roundtable session expanded the number of high-quality proposals that could be accepted. Each president-elect takes a unique approach to determining how these presentations are grouped. Fast forward to the 2019 roundtable sessions. The conference proposal team, led by President-Elect Kelly Tumy in the fall of 2018, curated three groups of roundtables to reflect the conference's theme (Beyond Books: A Close Look at the Research of Teacher Craft, Beyond Boots: Examining Culturally Responsive Teaching in Texas, and Beyond Borders: Extending Classroom Walls, Working Collaboratively). The roundtable sessions were quite popular, and empty seats were not always easy to find!

While increasing the number of accepted high-quality proposals is a positive step to take, there is a second, even more critical issue addressed by roundtable sessions. A wider diversity of session options enhances the overall conference experience for both attendees and presenters. TCTELA attendees now enjoy a variety of session types: keynotes at large general sessions and optional luncheons, extended workshops, concurrent sessions, and roundtable sessions.

## Reasons for Roundtables

Session diversity is the benefit that is most often touted in the research on conference organization. Rom (2012) bemoans the fact that many conferences are "governed more by authority and tradition than by careful consideration of how best to create stimulating and engaging environments for teaching and learning" (p. 334). He suggests that a conference should incorporate customization through a "democratic and market-based approach" (p. 340). The roundtable format encourages individual attendees to customize their conference experiences beyond the traditional choices of two-hour workshops and concurrent, one-hour sessions.

So why is it important for TCTELA conference planners to create various interactive experiences for attendees and presenters? For attendees, the straightforward answer is that we should plan conferences with an eye toward engagement, just as we plan instruction for our students. Ravn (2007) advocates for "a learning conference" that "would involve meeting participants and not render them passive victims of PowerPoint overload" (p. 213). Because roundtable presentations encourage discussion and input from everyone choosing to sit at the table, this format satisfies the design principles that Ravn (2007) proposes:

1) Expert input is fine, but it must be concise and provocative.

2) Input must be relevant to each delegate's [attendee's] concerns and projects.

3) Delegates must be active and talk about their projects.

4) Delegates must meet and inspire each other. (p. 217)

Presenters need interactive experiences as well. Roundtables provide an intimate setting for deeper learning, something more difficult to achieve in a packed ballroom amidst hundreds

## What is a Roundtable?

A "roundtable" gives presenters a chance to share research or practical ideas in a relaxed setting with a small group of participants. Each presenter (or pair or team of presenters) will be seated at a round table (fitting, right?) in a room with other roundtable presentations. A member of the TCTELA leadership will open the session, describing the way things will flow. We'll go around the room for brief introductions, and then participants can choose the table/topic that most interests them. Participants are encouraged to move about if they are interested in more than one topic.

Once settled at a table, let the authentic conversations begin! Within each 60-minute session, participants will be invited to choose two roundtables, one for the first half of the time (approximately 25 minutes) and another for the second half. Each presentation will be repeated during that second half.

Figure 1. Roundtable definition from TCTELA.

## Rounding up the roundtables (continued)

of attendees. Roundtables benefit presenters at many points of the conference experience continuum, a factor acknowledged by Jalongo and Machado (2016): "Roundtable sessions tend to be popular with professionals at different stages of their careers" (p. 63). Novice presenters find the roundtable format to be communal and convivial. Rather than facing the pressure of engaging a room of teachers for an hour, they can begin presenting with a low-pressure, inclusive conversation with others who are interested in their work. Seasoned presenters often describe the experience as refreshing and informative. Unlike the often formal and off-putting question-and-answer time slots following a traditional presentation, roundtable presentations engender a more authentic and organic participatory dialogue between presenters and attendees.

## Elements of Roundtables

When TCTELA members' proposals are accepted as roundtables, they receive an information page that includes some key tips for preparing their sessions (see Figure 2). In essence, the presenters begin by offering key points, perhaps referring to anchor charts, images displayed on a laptop turned toward the attendees, or student artifacts. Next the presenters elicit feedback from the attendees, often via a shared activity or guiding questions for discussion. Finally, as Galer-Unti and Tappe (2009) suggest, "It is usually a good idea to have a handout related to the presentation which includes contact information" (p. 67). More detailed tips, suggestions, and best practices for roundtable presentations are listed in Figure 3.

## Future of Roundtables

Since that first set of roundtable sessions at the 2016 conference, TCTELA has continued to select relevant and related proposals

to feature in our gatherings of research- and practice-oriented roundtable sessions. You are invited to join the conversations! As you begin crafting your proposal for the 2020 TCTELA conference, consider how you could share your "Vision & Voice" with next year's attendees. If you are seeking a genuine "opportunity for dialogue, networking, and refinement of ideas" (Grant & Tomal, 2015, p. 192), then open the proposal form and click the box next to "Research Roundtable" or "Roundtable in Practice." Propose your best ideas to grab your seat at the table. The next Proposal Review Team, led by our new President-Elect, Dr. Stephen Winton, will be looking and listening for you.

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| DO | DON'T |
|---|---|
| • Leave time during your "talk" to allow participants to engage with you and ask questions. | • Depend too heavily on the Internet or electrical power, as connectivity in hotels can sometimes be spotty. |
| • Consider providing a handout and/or PowerPoint presentation (shown from the laptop at the table) to allow participants to follow along. | • Project images onto walls or other areas around the room. |
| • Plan for an engaging, didactic conversation about your topic. | • Play loud sound from a device that might distract other tables. |
| • Consider including short activities. | • Do all of the talking. Consider the expertise of participants at your table. |

**Figure 2. TCTELA's roundtable tips.**

### Check out these sites for more information about roundtables!

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) offers *this comprehensive list* of tips for every phase of roundtables, from preparation to implementation. Also from the ACTFL, *this video* answers several questions for someone who is new to the roundtable format. The American Telemedicine Association offers *this succinct list* of best practices for roundtable presentations. The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology offers *several suggestions* for planning a roundtable presentation that is respectful of your participants' needs.

Finally, check out *this description* of comprehensive guidelines for roundtable presentations from the American Evaluation Association.

**Figure 3. Roundtable resources.**

# Using Beers and Probst's signposts to support the TEKS' strand 4: Multiple genres

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

Kylene Beers and Bob Probst's *Notice & Note* signposts provide helpful strategies when approaching the ELAR TEKS' Strand 4: Multiple Genres.

The signposts began when the authors explored the most commonly taught literary texts and noticed commonalities. Beers and Probst stated, "we began to notice some elements—which we eventually called signposts—that occurred in all the books across genres" (2012, p. 4).

For example, here is the signpost Contrasts and Contradictions:

When you're reading and a character says or does something that's opposite:

"Why is the character doing that?" The answer could help you make a prediction or make an inference about the plot and conflict. (2012, p. 114)

In David Litchfield's *The Bear and the Piano*, a bear gained fame as a concert pianist in a big city. However, one day he decided to leave it all and return to the forest (2015, p. 13-26). Reflecting on this contradiction in the bear's actions helps analysis of the conflict: he was torn between his new career and his home. Notice that the signpost Contrasts and Contradictions leads to analysis of plot and conflict found in Strand 4: Multiple Genre—Literary Elements (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

And here is the signpost Words of the Wiser:

When you're reading and a character (who's probably older and lots wiser) takes the main character aside and gives serious advice, you should stop and ask yourself:

"What's the life lesson, and how might it affect the character?"

Whatever the lesson is, you've probably found a theme for the story. (Beers & Probst 2012, p. 152).

In Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo wished the task of destroying the One Ring had not happened in his time. Gandalf offered advice: "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us" (1994, p. 50). A theme of the text is the importance of doing what good one can in difficult times. Again, the signpost Words of the Wiser leads to theme, found in Strand 4: Multiple Genre—Literary Elements (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

An advantage of these *Notice & Note* signposts is the focus on specific elements in a text, such as surprising actions or words of advice, that guide analysis of conflict, plot, and theme. We move from trying to explain literary terms and definitions in isolation to noticing how these work in authentic texts. Since the signposts Contrasts and Contradictions, Words of the Wiser, Tough Questions, Aha Moment, Memory Moment, and Again and Again are common across literary texts, these might be helpful in addressing many of the student expectations in Strand 4: Multiple Genre—Literary Elements.

Looking at Strand 4: Multiple Genres—Genres, in informational texts, students are expected to analyze the central idea/controlling idea/thesis and supporting evidence. Students are expected to analyze characteristics and structures of argumentative texts by identifying the author's claim and explaining how the author uses evidence (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Beers and Probst's signposts in *Reading Nonfiction*

can help with this. For example, here is the nonfiction version of Contrasts and Contradictions:

When you're reading and the author shows you a difference between what you know and what is happening in the text, or a difference between two or more things in the text, you should stop and ask yourself, "What is the difference and why does it matter?"

The answers will help you see details that show you the main idea, compare and contrast, understand the author's purpose, infer, make a generalization, or notice cause and effect. (Beers & Probst, 2016, p. 123)
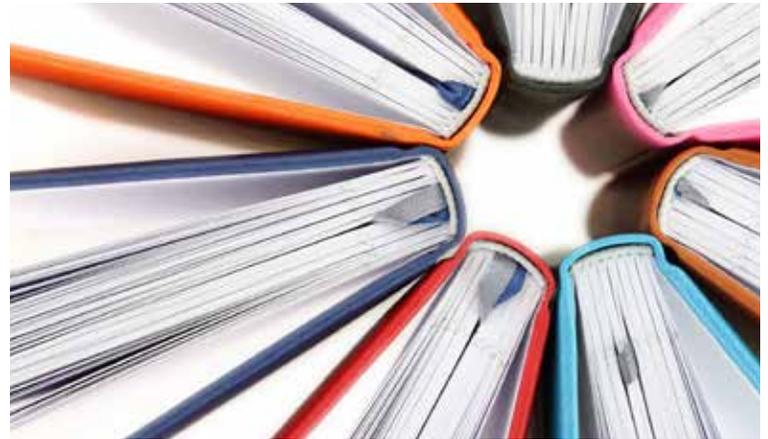


Thus, the signposts Contrasts and Contradictions can lead to analysis of the author's central idea or claim. The signposts Extreme or Absolute Language, Quoted Words and Numbers and Stats can reveal how the author provides evidence (2016, p. 148, 158).

Since I began working with the signposts, I see them everywhere. Recently, I visited the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and noticed this quote on the wall:

*In a land of great wealth, families must not live in hopeless poverty.*

*In a land rich in harvest, children just must not go hungry.*

*In a land of healing miracles, neighbors must not suffer and die unattended.*

*In a great land of learning and scholars, young people must be taught to read and write.*

*(Johnson, 1965)*

I noticed Contrasts and Contradictions, which helped me identify Johnson's claim: that with so much potential, our nation should do better. I also noticed the Extreme or Absolute Language of "hopeless poverty" and "suffer and die," which led me to reflect on *how* Johnson used evidence to support his argument.

Katie Wood Ray suggested a descriptive approach to literacy instruction: we describe what we see in good writing and then we try this in our own writing (1999, p. 19-21). Beers and Probst's signposts describe *how* authors utilize literary elements and genre characteristics. This is important because in TEKS' Strand 6: Composition—Genres students are expected to compose literary,

**Using Beers and Probst's signposts to support the TEKS' strand 4: multiple genres (continued)**

informational, and argumentative texts using genre characteristics and craft (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The signposts offer tangible examples of literary elements and genre characteristics students can use in their own writing. If we notice Contrasts and Contradictions reveal conflicts in literary texts or central ideas in informational texts, we can try this out in our composition. Since the signposts began by Beers and Probst noticing what authors do, writing through the signposts offers useful tools for making the reading and writing connection (Winton, 2016).

Beers and Probst's signposts offer keys for analysis of literary elements and genre characteristics. I look forward to utilizing them in working with ELAR TEKS' Strand 4: Multiple Genres.

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# What's new with PD2Teach—TCTELA's resource for the "new" ELAR/SLAR TEKS

By Valerie Taylor, PD2Teach Liaison

If you haven't yet checked out the resources available on the PD2Teach Bulb on the TCTELA website, take a *look*. With the implementation of the revised ELAR/SLAR TEKS for K-8 upon us, and the high school TEKS a year away, we need to continue to take time to better understand the exciting changes that will challenge us to rethink our instructional choices. In addition to videos where groups of Pre-K-16 ELA educators discuss the opportunities offered in each of the seven strands, including a three-part discussion of Author's Purpose and Craft, there are now two shorter videos where these educators consider what is new in relation to Collaboration and Multimodal and Digital Literacies. These videos are a great way to begin a conversation with teams of teachers because the participants discuss not only similarities and differences with the 2009 TEKS but also share instructional ideas for implementation. In addition, each video is accompanied by a set of Professional Learning Community (PLC) questions. Use these to guide face-to-face discussions with your teams of teachers about ways to enhance the learning of your students in the English Language Arts classes.

In addition, the PD2Teach team is developing a series of videos showing you the revised ELAR/SLAR TEKS in action across grade levels. The first videos in this series will be available on the Bulb in January after they premiere at the annual conference in Frisco, January 24-26, 2020. They will serve as models for the PD2Teach Challenge that we will issue at the conference. From January through March, we will ask teachers across the state to create their own videos to submit for possible feature on the PD2Teach Bulb. Details about how to accept the challenge will appear in the TCTELA Winter *Texas Voices* and be presented at the annual conference.

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## Reference:

TCTELA's PD2Teach resources: *https://www.bulbapp.com/ PD2Teach*

# What are you doing in October? Join the National Day on Writing

By Kelly E. Tumy, President

October will find many teachers longing for cooler weather and ready for their classes to find a groove and a rhythm, but it will also be a chance to try something new. In October, the National Council of Teachers of English hosts their annual free event: the *National Day on Writing*. The actual National Day on Writing is October 20th, but many schools and organizations hold their celebrations on October 18th, the Friday before, so they may write and engage students with the hashtag #WhyIWrite.

NCTE gets you ready to participate with tools and resources for libraries, schools, and communities to share in a national conversation about #WhyIWrite. Twitter will be full of written and video testimonials—just follow the hashtag and join the discussion. Last year Jacqueline Woodson, in her role as Young People's Poet Laureate, held a town hall meeting and a podcast to talk about writing processes and entering the #WhyIWrite chat. We look forward to what NCTE will offer this year for this day of reflection and engagement in the writing process.

Take some time to examine all the great materials on *www.whyiwrite. us*, and look for a link to the NCTE podcast to learn how to use those episodes in your class to strengthen student conversations about writing. Start thinking now how you answer the question: Why do I write? "See" you online and on Twitter October 1st through the 20th.

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WHY DO YOU WRITE?
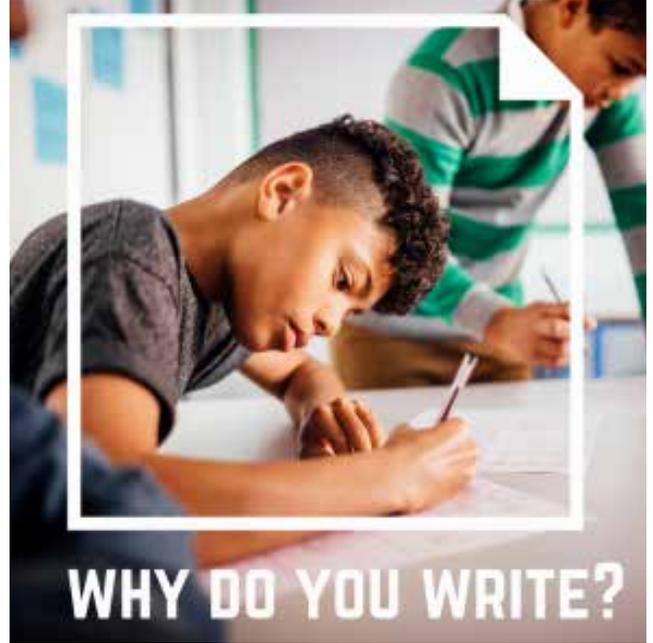
# Scaffold and release: How to implement new strategies when coaching, Pt 2.

By Josh Cooper, Recording Secretary

We are in the tail-end of summer and, admittedly, school is already on my mind. I wish that weren't true, but as most educators know, school and the coming year always begin to trickle into our thoughts as we gear up for the return of students. It also means that I am beginning to think back to the previous year as a coach, think about those strategies that really worked for the teachers I support, and how I might use them again this year.

Previously, I wrote about the power of checklists in helping teachers to scaffold understanding and implement a strategy efficiently after attending professional development. The power of a checklist comes in its ability to describe a strategy in a clear and concise way, making it easy to learn about, implement, and reflect on. Checklists help us to utilize a best practice to add to our repertoire of instructional strategies.

What happens when we long for a change in our classroom on a larger scale than just adding a new strategy? What happens when we want to implement student choice in reading in our classroom, or place a focus on the conferring process, or even shift our instructional model to a workshop approach? Each of these things can have checklists involved, but they are such big changes that there is not one concise checklist that can be used in helping teachers implement these new practices. As coaches, we still need to think about how we scaffold support for the teachers we work alongside so that the implementation of these practices goes well.

## Jigsaw Implementation

Recently, I had the good fortune to attend a training on coaching teachers in the workshop approach, and our trainer was Eric Hand from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. Eric's focus of the day was to help coaches learn new ways to support teachers as they make big changes in their classrooms. He took us to a lab school and walked us through several coaching strategies, one of which was the jigsaw method. Yes, the very same method we often use in our classrooms to divide and conquer the workload. The same approach can be used to scaffold support for teachers as they implement big changes in their classrooms.

## The Process

This strategy can work several different ways depending on the grade level of the teacher being supported. It can be done via a lab site, clinic, or one-on-one with a teacher. Jigsaw works especially well as a method when the change a teacher makes is a BIG change with many components to it. The goal is to slowly release the workload to the teacher with each time they implement the practice. So, the coach will take the bulk of the workload through the first round of implementation with the teacher specifically doing one part. Each time the practice is implemented, the coach lessens their own workload, and the teacher takes on more

## Scaffold and release: How to implement new strategies when coaching, Pt 2. (continued)

responsibility— again and again and again until the teacher is comfortable with the change they are making.

Let's think about what this work looks like in the realm of conferring with students about their writing. Typically, a successful conference has specific moves that a teacher makes with a student. They first research the writer and the work they are doing through asking questions and glancing over parts of the writing. Then, there is specific feedback given in the form of compliments and suggestions. The teacher then models or shows an example of the work a student could be doing to improve as a writer. Finally, the teacher asks the student to begin that work as they coach alongside the student before releasing them to return to their writing.

That's a lot of steps, and if this a teacher's first time to try conferring in this way, they may not be ready to tackle this all at once. With the jigsaw method, they are only responsible for taking on responsibility of one of these steps at a time. With the first student, the coach may do all the steps except for the last step of giving the student feedback as they try a new strategy. They may ask the teacher to do this and just watch the rest of the conference. After the first conference, the coach and teacher can reflect and plan for how that work will go with the next student, and then the teacher may take on another step. Each time they confer with students, the teacher takes on more and more steps, until eventually the teacher runs an entire conference by themselves with the coach present to support and reflect with the teacher.

What this does is allow the coach and the teacher to partner together to implement a big change with a lot of steps in their classroom and help each other. The great thing is that it relieves some stress from the teacher of having to do it all by themselves. This also builds their confidence because they only have to do a little bit at a time until they are comfortable to take on more.

This also positions the teacher as an equal to the coach because it places them into the coaching role for a bit. They get to observe and give feedback to the coach during the early portions of the jigsaw approach, and it really puts everyone on an equal playing field.

### Grade Level Differences

There are some things to consider depending on the grade level the teacher works with. The jigsaw method in secondary classrooms looks a little different than in primary. With primary, teachers typically only have a short time in which to implement a new practice that is ELA related because they have other content skills to work on besides just reading and writing in their classroom.

Coaches working with teachers in primary grades may consider utilizing a lab site or clinic. That is, they take the teachers to other grade levels during the day to practice these methods as well as in their own classrooms. This is usually done with a group of teachers so that everyone has the chance to practice as well as receive feedback from somebody.

What's nice about moving to a different grade level and classroom for teachers is that it releases them of the responsibility of classroom management. They only have to worry about the practice they are focusing, like conferring, rather than running a whole class of eight year olds.

At the secondary level, lab sites are available as well, but the jigsaw method can be utilized in the teacher's own classroom. The nature of secondary schedules and teachers teaching the same lesson all day long provides multiple opportunities to practice the strategies. Between each class, the coach and teacher can reflect and the coach can set new goals or steps for the teacher to work on during the next class. As the day progresses, the coach slowly releases more and more steps for the teacher to try, thus, building confidence and capacity to utilize the approach on their own.

As I write this article, I am keenly aware that summer is drawing to a close. My mind is beginning to shift away from the relaxing days towards the work that I will be partnering on with the teachers I support. I want to be more conscious this year about how that support looks and which strategies I can select and scaffold to support teachers. When a teacher asks for help with implementing a strategy, whether big or small, I know I have tools at my disposal to support them, and that helps me to relax for just a little bit longer.

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### Reference:

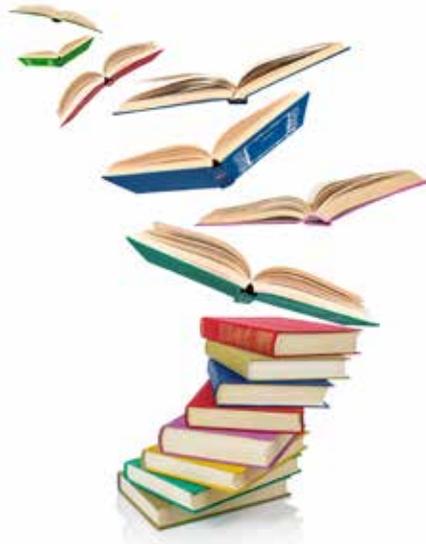Eric Hand, personal communication, April 11th, 2019.

# Takeaways from the Scholastic Reading Summit

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

I had the good fortune to attend the Scholastic Reading Summit held in Austin on July 16th. This was part of my summer professional development plan—a way to feed my ELAR teacher soul between the frenzy of the ending of the spring semester and the build-up to the fall semester. Not only did Scholastic have an incredible book fair set up at the Summit, they also had some fantastic speakers, including Mr. Schu (alias John Schumacher), Donalyn Miller, children's book authors Jenni Holm and Yuyi Morales, plus a bevy of breakout session presenters.

The topic that fascinated me was in a session titled "Looking at Harmful Stereotypes in Children's Literature." This session was presented by Kiera Parrott, reviews editor for *School Library Journal*, and Mahnaz Dar, a professional reading editor also at *School Library Journal*.

They showed the group the tropes to watch out for—from culture, to ethnicity, to gender diversity. As they walked us through what to watch for, they shared lots of examples. To my dismay, many well-known pieces of children's literature are filled with these harmful tropes and/or stereotypes. For example, I grew up with my grandmother reading and rereading Ludwig Bemelmans' classic *Madeline* picture book to me. I can still hear the lines in my head ("*In an old house in Paris that was covered with vines, lived twelve little girls in two straight lines . . .")*. As I type the words, even, I can hear Mommy Kate's voice in my head as she read the book to me!

However, what Parrott and Dar taught me was that in one of the *Madeline* books, Bemelmans writes about the gypsies who take Madeline and Pepito away. The presenters spoke about the use of the term *gypsies* and the fact that by writing about these people taking Madeline and Pepito, Bemelmans perpetuated a negative stereotype. Their message was not that the book itself is **bad**, but that as educators, we need to be aware and discuss these things with our students. It was enlightening!

Before finishing the session, Parrott and Dar had us choose children's books from a collection they brought in. We were instructed to check the illustrations and look for stereotypes, tokenism and invisibility; check storyline and relationships to infer messages about different lifestyles and cultures; consider effects the story might have on children reading the books-especially a diverse array of children; consider author/illustrator background and perspective; and finally, watch for loaded words. I'm anxious to get to the list of books my students read in our children's literature course and examine each book closely with these guidelines in mind. I also look forward to sharing these prompts with the students in those very children's literature classes so they can develop the skill of watching for harmful stereotypes and tropes in the books they choose to share with their future students!

Parrott and Dar shared this information that is part of a larger workshop they conduct through *School Library Journal*. For information on this workshop, "Evaluating, Auditing, and Diversifying Your Collections," visit *https://www.slj.com/?subpage=Events&eventtype=onlineCourses&status=past.*

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# Back to school social

By Abby Rayburn, Digital Coordinator

No, I'm not talking about happy hour, although I am super-supportive of these gatherings. As you get ready to head back to the classroom, campus, district, or wherever you live for 9.5 months of the year, I am issuing a challenge to get social with your outreach.

We are super quick to post pics of ourselves at the pool or the great cheesy pizza that was delivered to our table, but when it comes to our classrooms and instruction, we may be hesitant to click "post." I'm here to tell you to join in on the fun. Here are some reasons why you should jump on the social classroom bandwagon and some tips on starting your social journey.

Get social to:

- Communicate with parents, peers, and community the wonderful things that are happening in our schools! So often we only see the bad news on social media and TV. We definitely need to spread the encouragement and joy that education has to offer.

- Showcase your students. Gone are the days of hanging up student work in August and taking it down and dusting it off in May! Keep it current and show the world and your students

**Back to school social (continued)**

how proud you are of all of their accomplishments and contributions.

- Share the love! As educators, we all know that some of our best ideas were begged and borrowed off of someone else, adapted to our students' needs, and made into something new and fantastic! Share the wealth with your fellow educators everywhere, and contribute your great ideas to their classroom experiences.

**Tips and Tools:**

- Create new social accounts for yourself as a teacher or for your classroom. You do not want to mix your personal accounts with your professional ones since you will be inviting parents, students, colleagues, and the community to follow your classrooms' journey this year.

- Before posting pictures, make sure that all of your students' guardians have signed a technology release so that you have legal permission to post student pictures and likenesses. If you have students who do not have this documentation, make sure

to focus on work samples only. Also, be aware of your school or district policy for social media use.

- Create a class hashtag. Get your students in on the fun and create a unique hashtag for posting on all platforms. Parents, kids, friends, and colleagues can follow your hashtag and get updates whenever you are posting something new. You could even make it a competition, and have the class vote on their favorite one. Every time you post, make sure to use it so your followers can be inspired.

- Monitor and curate. Make sure you are representing all of the students in your classroom as you showcase these brilliant minds. Monitor comments to make sure that there are no negative interactions taking place, as you want to make sure this stays a safe place for your community to interact.

Make this the year that you put your classroom on social media, share your students' experiences with others, and provide a great example for other teachers out there! Don't forget to tag us @TCTELA.

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# The reading brain

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

A couple of weeks ago I received an email regarding changes to teacher certification, specifically, that beginning in January of 2021, all EC-Grade 8 teachers will have to take an additional certification test in the science of teaching reading. On one level, this is great news. I believe all teachers should have some training in teaching reading no matter what level they teach. On the other hand, it is daunting to think about the curricular (and other) changes that will have to come as a result of HB 3.

But what even is the "science of teaching reading?" This summer I was privileged to attend an institute at MIT in Boston on Reading and the Brain. I learned far too much to communicate here in this short venue but I took away a few kernels of truth that I would like to share. Probably most importantly I learned what I knew instinctively–that the mere fact that any of us learn to read is nothing short of miraculous. I could recite to you things about the visual cortex, tempo-parietal regions, left and right hemispheres, but the anatomical and neurological intricacies were not what stood out to me.

The human brain is perfectly designed for spoken language because "humans are particularly socially interactive creatures, which makes communication central to our existence." (Schoenemann, 163). It is thought that hominids have been using speech to communicate for roughly a million years. Over time, our brains have evolved in tandem with speech. They are uniquely designed for oral communication. However, written language has only been around for about 5000 years and more importantly, written material has only been accessible to the masses for about 600 years, since the invention of the printing press allowed for mass production of written material. Up until that time, only 30 percent of Europeans were literate.

Think about it. As an evolving species we have had fewer than 1000 years to adapt to the monumental task of reading. Plainly put, our brains were not designed to read. Reading the printed word is not part of our evolutionary process, but rather, a human construct.

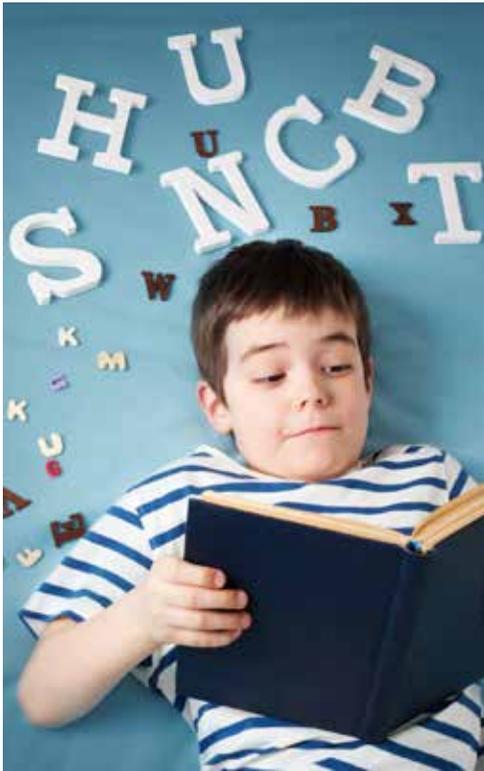This simple fact shook my world. I had never thought of

### The reading brain (continued)

it that way. Our brains have found a way to accommodate written language, but this activity is not part of our original or evolutionary design. So when I learned that approximately 10% of readers have dyslexia, I was amazed. How magnificent is our brain that 90% of us can learn to read even though our brains were not designed for it. This same stark fact made me look differently at students with reading difficulty.

The dyslexic brain is in fact different structurally than the brain of a naturally proficient reader, but neuroscience shows that these different dyslexic brains can learn to read, and there are any number of structured programs that have been successful with dyslexics. These same dyslexia programs and interventions can also be best practice for capable readers as well. Still, dyslexic brains, even with intervention, do not construct the same pathways as proficient readers. For most of us, reading is a "left brain" activity where much of language processing occurs. However, dyslexic brains do not develop the same neural connections. Studies show that dyslexic brains instead develop right brain pathways. (Gabrielli et al, Dougherty et al. Hoeft et al.) Dyslexic brains are simply different. While dyslexic students can absolutely learn to read, they never process written language in the same way as proficient readers.

This brings me back to where I started–House Bill 3 and the new certification requirements for the science of teaching reading. I know change is difficult and another test is, well, another test, another demand. But we live in an age filled with scientific evidence from which we can draw an understanding of what was once unknowable. These same understandings can lend credence to the everyday work of teachers and their importance in the process of teaching reading to all students.

Brain science supports what we do as teachers. While taking time to learn new techniques and incorporating another element into our already packed teaching day may feel overwhelming, we are validated by neuroscience that underscores how much we are needed to facilitate the reading process for all children.

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# Using literature circles to incorporate diverse literature

By Roni Burren, Vice-President Elect

We can't deny that our world is changing. Every year our student population grows more and more diverse. In any given classroom there are students from various regions in the world, country, and state. It really is a beautiful thing. As teachers and teacher-leaders we must ensure that those students are reading books where they can see their stories with characters who look like them. With various curriculum demands, it's not always easy for teachers to see how to include diverse literature. However, the inherent power of a literature circle can be an exciting way to introduce diverse literature to students.

The basic idea around literature circles is quite simple. Literature circles are, in essence, small book clubs where students lead in-depth discussions around a piece of literature that they are all reading. Student choice is also a key component in literature circles as students are allowed to choose which text they will read. That choice provides one way to group students together. This is where the diversity comes in.

Teachers should consider literature that is diverse in its authorship, characters, storyline, genre, and subject matter. More often than not, diverse literature does an excellent job tackling controversial current events and content. Because of that, using diverse literature for an entire class could lead students and teachers away from candid discussions and challenging questions about said topics. However, in a literature circle, students and teachers can grapple with tough topics in a smaller setting. As a result, deeper, more meaningful reading conversations take place.

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# Social emotional learning in the literacy workshop

By Tomasina Burkhardt, Teacher Development Section Chair

By definition, "social emotional learning (SEL) is the process in which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL). These skills are vital for today's students in the complex society in which they live. The access and availability afforded to students is overwhelming and students need the necessary skills to navigate situations regarding how to react and respond, how to engage, and how to develop decision-making processes that allow appropriate decisions to be made. Just as students encounter multiple complex situations in day-to-day living, they also encounter multiple complex situations in day to day academic settings.

One classroom structure that is making a resurgence to the reading language arts classrooms is the reading and writing workshop model, or commonly referenced as literacy workshops. Many reading language arts classrooms are revisiting the literacy workshop model because of the numerous opportunities that afford teachers to implement "best practice" strategies and tools that aid the learning of students and improve overall student outcomes. Because of its design, the literacy workshop model is ideal for embedding social emotional learning skills components.

The components for social emotional learning grow from individual self-awareness to broader emotional growth that directly affects others. The five components include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Including the social emotional learning components in the literacy workshop structure is not difficult; however, purposeful planning is critical in order for both the academic and social emotional skills to work seamlessly in the workshop activities.

Although terminology may vary, basic structures within the literacy workshop schedule include overarching topics as: explicit teaching and mini lesson, independent practice (that may entail reading practice or writing time), teacher conferencing and guided work, partner time and sharing, and a final closure. Designated timeframes are assigned to each scheduled activity with, in general, more time allotted for independent practice and teacher conference.

Reviewing and synthesizing components included in both the social emotional learning skills and the literacy workshop activities culminates into a simple planning tool to address social emotional skills in the literacy workshop activities. Using a matrix graphic organizer in the form of a four-by-five chart during the planning phase will assist with purposeful planning of embedding social emotional learning skills into the literacy workshop activities. The design of the matrix graphic organizer has the identified literacy workshop activities labeled horizontally, across the top of the chart, and the five social emotional learning components labeled vertically, along the left side of the chart. Within each corresponding chart cell, reflective questions and formative assessment activities are written to ensure seamless integration.

To successfully plan and embed social emotional learning skills, for each literacy activity ask these questions related to each social emotional learning component:

- For self-awareness, how can students accurately recognize their own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior? How can students gain the ability to accurately assess their strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset"?

- For self-management, how can students regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations? When they become stressed, how can students effectively manage stress, control impulses, and motivate themselves? What personal and academic goals are students able to set and work toward?

- For social awareness, how can students take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures? How can students gain the ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior?

- For relationship skills, how can students establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups? How can students gain the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed?

- For responsible decision making, how can students make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms? How do students gain the understanding of the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, as well as a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others?

For each of the reflective planning questions, consider activities that integrate the skills in the literacy workshop. The integration should be seamless and support the overall objectives of the literacy workshop activity and not created as an additional perfunctory task for students to complete. Formatively assessing students through the use of reflective questioning, either verbal or written, appears to engage students more authentically.

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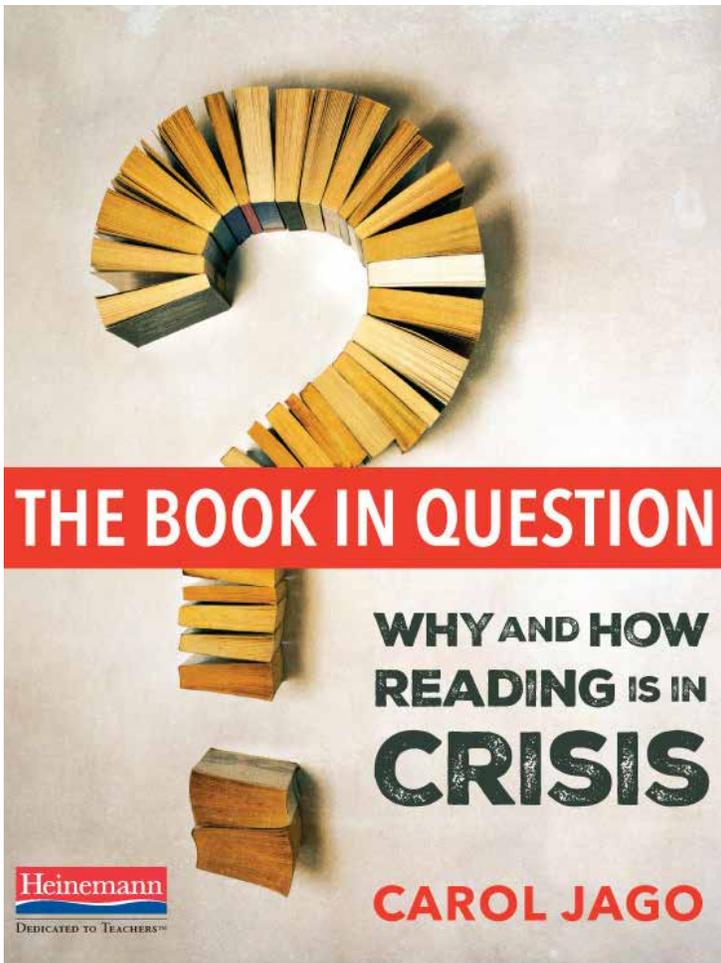
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# What and how we teach matters: A book review

By Valerie Taylor, PD2Teach Liaison

be human, what it has meant to be human in the past, and what it might mean to be human in the future" (p. ix). She also challenges us to think about how we teachers can avert the "reading crisis" through intentional choices about encouraging and guiding the readers in our classrooms. We have, Jago (2019) argues, a responsibility to help our students become confident readers who know why reading more matters, and who know how to choose books and how "to persevere with a long, complex text" (p. 4). We have a responsibility to create a classroom environment where students have time to read and time to talk about what they are reading, where it is "safe to take interpretive risks" (p. 3).

To help us learn more about how to provide these opportunities and these classrooms for our students, Jago (2019) provides not only a wealth of research to support her position but a plethora of ideas for "inspired instruction" (p. 19). She shows us how we can create a culture of reading, one where we are intentional about our choices of which books to teach, where we understand that our instructional moves matter, where all kinds of books are valued, and where our questions open up students' understanding and wonder. Jago pushes us to consider a new way of thinking about what it means to "teach" a book. In the appendices, she also provides an extensive list of suggestions for classroom libraries for middle school and high school as well as lists of "10 Books…," everything from "10 Books That Took Me to Places I Had Never Been but Needed to Go" (p. 145) to "10 Adventure Books for Twelve-Year-Old Boys" (p. 149).

Consider choosing *The Book in Question: Why and How Reading is in Crisis* by Carol Jago (2019) for your next professional book study and learn more about what she means when she writes, "how and what we teach matters" (p. 114).

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In Carol Jago's latest book, *The Book in Question: Why and How Reading is in Crisis* (2019), she challenges us to remember "what reading actually is: an act of discovery…to find what it means to

# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

***English in Texas,*** **Vol. 49.2 (Fall/Winter 2019)**

**Theme: Teachers as Readers and Writers**

**Manuscript Deadline: September 1, 2019**

**Column Deadline: September 1, 2019**

**Call for Submissions:**

The Fall/Winter issue of English in Texas is focused on teachers as readers and writers. Language diversity in the classroom is growing at a rapid pace. Standards for English Language Arts teachers from professional organizations such as the National Council for Teachers of English, the International Literacy Association, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards all include standards calling for English teachers to possess an enthusiasm for both reading and writing.

As English language arts teachers, our goal is to not only teach the standards, but to promote lifelong reading and writing. In order to accomplish that, we must be positive models of reading and writing for our students. As Katherine Paterson wrote in her book *Gates of Excellence: On Reading and Writing Books for Children* (1981), "We cannot give them what we do not have. We cannot share what we do not care for deeply for ourselves. If we prescribe books as medicine, our children have a perfect right to refuse the nasty-tasting spoon."

How do you see yourself as a reader? As a writer? How does your reading impact your instruction? How does your writing impact your instruction? How do you share your literacy with your students? What impact does this sharing have on them? How do you work to, as NCTE says, build your stack of to-read books? In what kinds of writing do you engage?

We encourage you to think about yourself as a reader and writer, and we invite interested individuals to submit manuscripts, conceptual, pedagogical, research-based, and theoretical related to teachers as readers and writers. 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 Fall/Winter columns, "Putting it all Together" and "The Tech-Savvy Teacher" as related to the theme of teachers as readers and writers. 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 you full column.

The columns to be published in the Fall/Winter 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.*