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From the Editor's Desk

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From the Editor's Desk

"Hey, Wait Up!"

BY MARY JO FINNEY

I imagine you might be thinking *Whoa! What's up with the cover? Where did that cartoon come from?* I hope you found it amusing. My intent in asking comic book artist Jerzy Drozd to create a cover was to pique your curiosity—and make you laugh. In my view, curiosity and humor are critical to teaching, and I wanted to inspire both in you.

Much of what I strive to accomplish as a teacher is fostering curiosity in my students. I want my students to *want to know*—not merely have to know. By fueling their desire to know, I have charged their minds to explore, search, imagine, and seek. Granted, we have a great deal of content to cover. Teaching in a context where the students' curiosity is on board, however, yields a different outcome than teaching students who are merely going through the motions of learning because it is required of them. Curiosity signals engagement.

Humor is a unique tool for engagement. We experience the pleasure of laughter by drawing upon deep skills. When we listen to a joke, what makes us laugh is our ability to infer. A funny joke offers just enough information for the listener to make a leap between what is said and what is implied.

In the case of a funny cartoon, we experience humor by *reading* the rich interplay between two symbol systems (picture and text). Whether image or alphabet, we must draw upon our existing knowledge in order to decode symbols, make inferences, and construct meaning. What makes us laugh is that which we infer from the picture and the text as they work together. We cannot be amused if we don't understand; yet all of this happens without thinking too hard. Cartoon humor can be deeply engaging.

What I find curious about comics is the interplay between image and text. If I look at the cover, were I to read only "Hey, wait up!" there would be no reason to laugh. While I could imagine chuckling at just the image of two eyeballs left behind in the rush, it is the text and image *together* that make me laugh. I am not even sure why.

As Michigan teachers of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing, we have a world of possibilities open to us in how we excite and inspire our students to think and communicate. Piquing curiosity, working with humor, teaching our students to decode symbols, make inferences, and construct meaning are all matters of the mind. And that, by definition, is the territory we teachers must affect.



A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Mary Jo Finney".

Mary Jo Finney
Editor, MRJ, Winter 2008 Issue
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Note: As Pat and I finish our third and final year as co-editors of the MRJ, we are each taking a turn to edit one issue solo. Pat edited the fall issue, I edited this issue, and we will co-edit our final issue in the spring.

In this issue:

K. Dara Hill ponders the conflict in her sixth graders' Book Club and shares her profound discovery that, upon reflection, we might discover something of value in what we thought was our worst moment. Her research approach to examining the conversations of her sixth graders underscores the value of methodical, systematic examination of that which we might otherwise miss.

Judith Ableser shares her third article in a series about enacting a Young Authors Program. Many teachers struggle to find strategies for teaching that accommodate—without isolating—students with special needs. Judith's article highlights the Young Authors Program as a momentous event for any writer, but especially

for students with special needs who stand to gain from the acknowledgement that they, indeed, are published authors.

Judy Kelly turns what could be a nightmare for teachers into a dream-come-true with her thoughtful approach to teaching second graders how to write a magazine feature article. Following the Grade Level Content Expectation for teaching this particular genre to the youngest of writers, she offers a step-by-step approach based on many of her favorite authors who write about writing.

Author and poet David Harrison has delighted readers for 47 years with more than 70 books for young people translated into 10 languages; anthologized in over 80 books; with over 10 million copies sold. In this article, David zooms in to the individual moments and insights his young readers experience that are miraculous for both reader and author!

Anne Carillo offers rich insight into the use of visual metaphor for supporting second language learners' reading comprehension. Her clever approach helps students link strategies with familiar career roles through the use of visual symbols. By tapping into visual symbols, the sub-skills of reading comprehension are taught implicitly and explicitly to English language learners and native speakers, alike.

Miriam Shumba underscores the links between art and literacy as she describes her work with the Literacy Arts Comic Book Project. Watching comic book artist Jerzy Drozd lead her third graders through the creation of comics led Miriam to learn that comics offer endless possibilities for teaching reading comprehension skills.

In this issue's Vintage Vision, W. Dorsey Hammond inspires us to look backward and forward to the MRA conference. In 1999, Dorsey envisioned the 2010 conference. He forecasted the issues we might be grappling with and suggested ways to avert some pitfalls. In his contemporary version, Dorsey reflects on his forecast and offers insight for the years ahead.

The *MRJ* showcases the creative talent of Michigan teachers in the Teachers as Writers section, and, as always, book reviews featured in Window Seat, Bookends, and Professional Books of Interest pique our curiosity about some of the very best books we must read!

Call for Applications

Michigan Reading Journal Editorship

Are you looking for

- a stimulating and creative professional experience?
- opportunities to communicate with other educators about literacy?
- a volunteer position that touches thousands of lives in Michigan?

Our 3-year term as co-editors of the *Michigan Reading Journal (MRJ)* finishes with the Spring/Summer 2008 issue. The Michigan Reading Association is accepting applications for the editorship of the *Michigan Reading Journal* for a 3-year term that begins in fall 2008.

Eligibility includes:

- current employment as full-time university faculty (in the case of co-editors, one must meet this criteria);
- access to institutionally-sponsored clerical support (approximately 20 hours of monthly assistance for editor(s) plus cost of postage and mailing supplies for correspondence with authors)
- current membership in the Michigan Reading Association

Responsibilities include:

- editing three issues annually (Fall, Winter, Spring/Summer);
- coordinating with the copy and layout editor and book review column editors;
- maintaining excellence;
- updating and maintaining an active, knowledgeable, editorial review board;
- soliciting and receiving manuscripts, determining suitability for review, sending manuscripts to reviewers, monitoring the review process;
- communicating with authors about the status of manuscripts and providing specific feedback for revisions;
- determining suitability of manuscripts for publication;
- preparing reports as needed for the MRA Board meetings;
- serving as appointed member(s) reporting to the MRA Board of Directors

Application procedure:

Send an electronic copy of your completed application **by March 15, 2008**, to the current *MRJ* co-editors, who will then review applications and send finalists' names to the MRA president for consideration:

Dr. Mary Jo Finney
mjfinney@umflint.edu

Dr. Patricia Gallant
pgallant@umflint.edu

Include your current vita and a letter of application that responds to the following questions:

- Why do you wish to serve as editor(s) of the *Michigan Reading Journal*?
- What interests and qualities will you bring to the editorship?
- In what ways do you envision the *MRJ* for educators?