



Jacksonville State University

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Writing Project Anthology

Jacksonville, Alabama

Summer 2012

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Dedication

This anthology is dedicated to all of the “out-of-the-box” thinkers, the ones who live up to the charge of Ulysses: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield”~Tennyson (line 70).



Foreword

During the twenty-fifth anniversary of the JSU Writing Project Summer Institute, we sought to force ourselves “outside the box.” From the very beginning, we recognized that teaching is a gift we give to our students, a gift that should not be tethered, hidden, or constrained. So we set about helping one another find ways to rid ourselves of the boxes we arrived in. In doing so, it has been our hope that our students will benefit from our efforts through a fresh perspective, a novel approach, a flipped classroom, or even a new voice. The practical pieces of wisdom we will take away from our time together stretch far beyond the pages of this book, but we have collected our best here. These pages represent the many edges of the boxes we have dismantled in our efforts to become more than we were, and we now face the world armed with the determination, the desire, and the understanding necessary to bring others “outside the box” as well.



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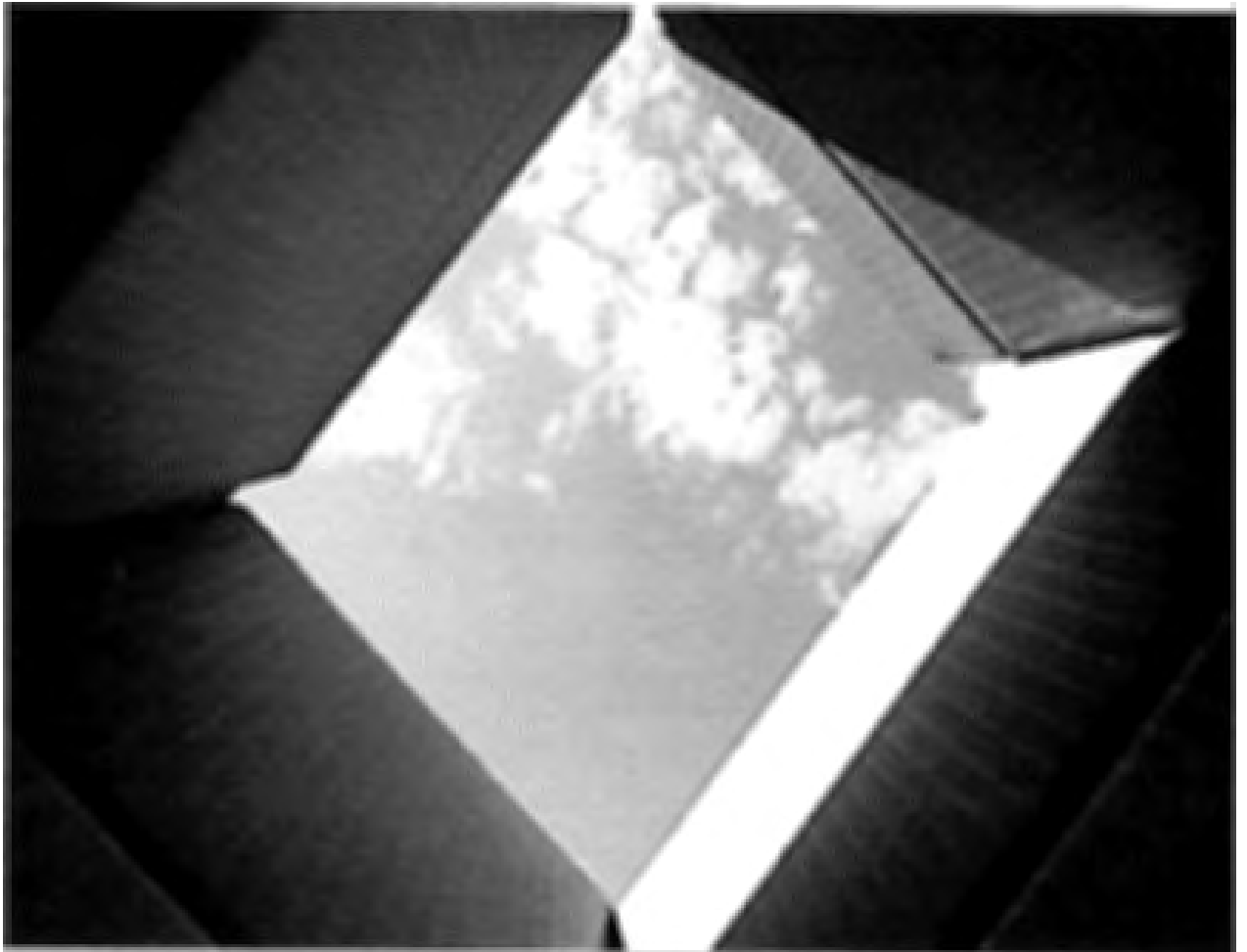
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Daily Schedule

9:00-9:30	Journals, group time, and announcements
9:30-11:00	Teacher demonstrations
11:00-12:00	Reading, writing, and research time
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-3:00	Response groups (Mon. & Thurs.)
	Reading, writing, and research time (Tues. & Wed.)
3:00-3:50	Roundtable discussions
3:50-4:00	Wrap-up



Demonstration Summaries

Creativity and Conjunctions: Combining the Parts of Speech with Narrative Writing

During this demonstration, the teacher began by reviewing the parts of speech with the students. She asked students to recall the parts of speech they had already discussed in class, and she explained that today they would learn about conjunctions and combine their knowledge with narrative writing. To capture their attention, she showed Grammaropolis, a short YouTube video on the eight parts of speech. Then, the students played a timed review game. Each team of two was given a part of speech, such as adjective, and they had three minutes to write as many words that were that type as possible. Next, the teacher used guided reading notes and a PowerPoint during her discussion on the three types of conjunctions, and the students practiced using the conjunctions as a class and individually. For the day's major activity, the teacher assigned a narrative essay of three to five paragraphs. The students were allowed to work with a partner, and the teacher gave each pair a story starter, such as "A mysterious box was sitting on the doorstep." The students had to include at least ten conjunctions in their stories and at least one of each of the three types. After writing the stories, students were asked to draw an illustration that represented their narratives. After students finished their work, they shared with their peers. As a closing activity, the class participated in Mad Libs as another form of review.

Ashley Bryant

Tackling the Dramatic Monologue

This lesson attempts to explain dramatic monologues in a way that is accessible for most young people in our modern world by using pop culture as a fulcrum. After an introduction discussing dramatic monologues, the teacher leads the class in a discussion about heroism. The teacher then divides the class into small groups of two to four for the next part of the activity. Groups are then instructed to choose a superhero from pop culture and write a letter from this hero's point of view. The letter should concern the hero's thoughts as he or she nears retirement. After writing time, groups are instructed to share their letters. Next, a debriefing activity follows in which the teacher makes connections between the letter writing activity and dramatic monologues. The teacher then performs a dramatic reading of Tennyson's "Ulysses" and leads a discussion of the poem as an example of dramatic monologue. Finally, extension activities include both a creative option and a more academic choice. The creative option asks students to create their own dramatic monologues while the academic choice asks students to write an

analysis of the strategies Tennyson uses in “Ulysses” to explore the theme of heroism, persistence, or self-discovery.

Kenny Clevenger

Point of View and Perspective Using *The Great Gatsby*

This lesson explores the differences between point of view and perspective, using *The Great Gatsby* and Shmoop study guide from *Shmoop.com*. The teacher begins with a Prezi presentation and completes guided notes to introduce point of view and perspective. After approximately twenty minutes of notes, the teacher randomly assigns groups for the four main characters of the novel: Nick Caraway, Daisy Buchanan, Jay Gatsby, and Tom Buchanan. These students group up according to other students who drew the same character. The teacher then introduces students to *Shmoop.com* as a valid instructional tool. After a brief introduction, students navigate to their assigned character’s summary. The students then complete a GIST activity, describing their character as fully as possible in only twenty words or less. This activity should not take more than five to ten minutes. Students find their character’s timeline. The teacher will then explain that students will rewrite their assigned character’s timeline, changing the point of view from the Shmoop timeline into a well-developed paragraph, journal, dramatic monologue, etc. After their POV activity is completed, the teacher will show students how to sign up for Prezi and simply type their POV activity into the already created Prezi canvas. Students will post both the GIST activity and the POV activity on the wall.

Rachael Couch

Using Film as a Tool in the ELA Classroom: *The Lion King*

Traditional English lessons often begin with reading a novel. A typical lesson may require the students to fill out a study guide or worksheet about the novel, after which the teacher may show a movie adaptation of the novel to complete the activities for this lesson. Each student would create mental pictures for what the characters, settings, and other details of the story may look like based on the privacy of his or her own personal schema. But what if the movie was used as a teaching tool before the novel was read? Or, what if the skills needed to critically analyze literature could be learned from watching a movie, before the novel was read?

This demonstration was designed to teach students how to critically analyze a movie applying film terminology used by the director of the movie. The teacher uses the animated Disney version of *The Lion King* as a tool to demonstrate how students will understand the thought process used by the director when planning camera angles, shot selections, and lighting to tell a story. The students and teacher are able to visualize together exactly how the director uses these techniques to tell the story. The teacher is

able to rewind the scene, if need be, and to explain from a different angle what the director of the movie wanted to show his audience for them to understand the story of the film. Learning how to critically analyze a film, with the teacher as a guide, helps prepare the students to grasp the critical thinking skills necessary to read literature.

This lesson introduces film terminology to create a foundation for critically analyzing a film from the director's viewpoint. Once students become confident in analyzing a film, they may become more confident when asked to examine a piece of literature. The goal of this lesson is to strengthen analytical skills through the medium of film, which can be viewed collectively, with hopes of progressing toward analyzing stories and poems unassisted.

Mary Cox

Hunger Games Conflict Mutation Creations

In a classroom environment where student engagement is a constant challenge, teachers need to look for new and exciting ways to teach the fundamental concepts of literature. In an effort to do just that, this lesson uses the popular, contemporary, young adult novel, *The Hunger Games*, to illustrate the use of conflict in literature. The lesson begins with a quick review of the elements of the plot using a graphic representation of a plot diagram. Next, students are introduced to the different types of conflict and use guided notes to follow the teacher driven PowerPoint presentation detailing examples of both external and internal conflict as seen in *The Hunger Games*. The presentation is followed by an assignment that allows students to further expand their understanding of external conflict by creating an animal mutation like those used in the novel. Students must not only create an original animal mutation, but explain their concept, special traits, and coping techniques associated with their mutation. The lesson ends with students sharing their creations with the entire class and answering any questions their classmates may have about their creation.

Delilah Darden

Poetry

Poetry can be intimidating, especially to middle school students; therefore, annotating poetry is designed to help students comprehend and connect with the poem in a different way. This lesson is a continuation from a unit based on the novel *The Outsiders*, and it is targeted to middle school students. However, it can be adapted to any grade using any novel. The teacher begins the lesson by reviewing autobiographical information about S.E. Hinton and the previous lessons on setting, plot, point of view and characterization.

The teacher uses a “Quick Write” activity where students list all things that are valuable to them. Then, after students share their lists with another student, the teacher reads the poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” to the students. Students take notes on the poetic devices that will be used in annotating the poem. A YouTube video shows Ponyboy reciting the poem, and the teacher discusses the plot events surrounding the integration of the poem. The students work in groups to determine the following: imagery and details, unfamiliar words and poetic devices, comparisons, plot events and conflicts, and diction, sentence structures, and other literary elements, with each group having a different responsibility. The groups have the opportunity to share their annotations while other students add each group’s findings to the poem. In the final activity, students use the TPCASTT model to create a mobile, using evidences and illustrations to support each section. The teacher hangs each mobile from the ceiling to display the students’ work.

Kellilyn Sechrest

Teacher Demo Summary

The lesson “Interviewing Poetry” aimed to help students develop their own voices. We began by reading a few excerpts from different authors: political, humorous, and serious. We searched for elements in the excerpts that identify the speaker, the audience, and the tone. After we discussed the differences, we did an activity in which students chose characters and answered the question “Why is writing important to you” in the character’s voice. We discussed how word usage, sentence length, and content would change from character to character. After sharing, students took guided notes on poetry terms. Students then partnered up and began interviewing each other on their own respective favorite activities. After the interviews, students traded papers and cut up their own words to make a found poem.

Doran Smith

I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream for Diamante Poetry!

This demonstration integrates a real experience, such as making homemade ice cream, with basic elementary-level skills to create descriptive poetry. Diamante poems follow a very simple format, using specific parts of speech for each line. In this way, students recall and use grammatical knowledge to connect their thoughts to form poetry. Diamante poetry is also used in the demonstration to identify synonyms and antonyms and to compare and contrast varying topics and ideas. This lesson also lends itself as a springboard for additional writing activities like descriptive dessert writing and expository recipe creations.

Nicolle Smith

Ashley Bryant



Think, believe, dream, and dare.

-- Walt Disney

Where I'm From

I am from fancy china,
from Band-Aids and olive oil
I am from the swing beneath the tree.
I am from the vegetable garden, the rose bush
where they left us gifts from the surprise man.

I am from silence and laughter.
From Olin and Ellen and Casper.
From "go throw it in the creek" to "I'll take care of it."
I am from I shall not be moved,
amazing grace, and paper fans.

I'm from Cairo and Louina,
quinces and figs.
From the cow who was a man to the bulldog who ran away.
And she who dared to dream.
I am from the hope chest
that belonged to my great-great grandmother
that will one day be mine,
holding memories of the past
and the promise of tomorrow.

“Hey Girl. Come and Sit”

My great-aunt insists that when people die, nature will grieve for them if they were connected. As she is a person who devotes much of her life to superstitions, I have always been far too logical not to become exasperated when she shares what she believes is her wisdom with me.

If anyone was connected to nature, it was my grandfather. As a child, I spent my summers with my grandparents, and each day, I found my grandfather in his garden. For hours, I watched him work, and he never scolded me for playing or running among his rows of squash, tomato, and bean plants. He was a quiet man, and while others sometimes found his nature frustrating and distant, I believe that is one of the reasons why we shared such a special bond. We did not need words to communicate, and I preferred being outside with him instead of being confined in the house with my grandmother and rambunctious cousin. When the day's work was finished, he would sit beneath the tree in his backyard, the same tree that he had planted after he and my grandmother moved into their home forty years earlier. After living with him for nearly fifty years, my grandmother knew that this quiet reflection was a necessity for him after the day's work, and she warned my cousin and me to give him his peace. Never one to follow rules, I always made my way back outside after she insisted I come in the house. Though I am sure my intrusion was an annoyance to him at first, he accepted my presence, eventually building me a swing in my favorite color that he placed below the shade of the tree. The conversation was minimal; most days I would read, write, or draw while he gazed upon the land, mulling over the day's activities. Though other children

would have found such a routine monotonous and boring, I treasured the time we spent together, and I believe he did as well.

As a teenager, I outgrew the swing and no longer spent entire summers with my grandparents, but when I visited, I would always find him beneath our tree, even in the coldest months of the year. After visiting my grandmother inside, I would dash through the house and down the back porch stairs to see him. He never greeted me by name. Instead, he would holler, "Hey, girl! Come and sit." I always obeyed, and the ease of our coexistence never wavered, even as I grew older. As a teenager, I became interested in our family's history, and though I had spent many summers with my grandparents, I knew little about their past. On one particular visit, I decided to ask him how he met my grandmother, even if he disregarded the question. After asking, I realized that everyone has a story to tell, and perhaps this quiet man had just been waiting all these years to share his. He did not ignore my question, and he also gave me so much more than I even knew to ask. Beneath the tree, I learned their history, my mom's history...my history.

During his eighty years, my grandfather was rarely sick, and I can never recall him visiting a doctor. When he had a heart attack at the beginning of last year, the doctors informed the family that his heart was too weak for him to survive the surgery that he needed, and he was placed under the care of hospice. For three months, he insisted that he was getting stronger each day, and he vowed that he would be outside planting his garden in the spring. Part of me believed him or at least wanted to believe him. How unnatural it was to visit him in his hospital bed in the living room, a confining space I knew he abhorred. Still, his greeting to me never changed, and instead of our tree, I opened the window beside his bed to at least remind him of his days of serenity. In March, he

appeared stronger; he was able to walk to the porch, though not yet able to descend the steps to his tree. Our family promised him that next weekend we would get a wheelchair and take him to his tree and garden. Three days later, he suffered a stroke; next week never arrived for him.

On the day of the funeral, all of the immediate and extended family gathered at my grandparents' house for the meal and to show love and support to my grandmother. Though close to my family, I am not partial to large groups of people, and the house was beginning to feel restricting. I escaped through the backdoor when no one was looking, and I walked to our tree just to sit under it. Since it was early spring, the leaves had covered the tree even before his death, and though I may be projecting my feelings onto it, I recall its being more beautiful than ever. In the days prior, friends and neighbors had expressed condolences for the man they knew as quiet but kind and always willing to share the harvest from his garden. Family also surrounded me, but through the commotion, I felt disconnected from the entire experience, as if we were just waiting for him to join us. Outside, I grieved alone for the first time, recognizing that I had never been in that place without him. He would never sit underneath the tree again.

Though it has been over a year since his death, I still miss my grandfather, and at times, I have to remind myself not to go to our tree when I visit my grandmother. Last month, during one of my visits, my grandmother stated abruptly, "Your papaw's tree's dead." I had not ventured into the back yard in months, but I thought she had to be mistaken. I sprinted to the tree, and the evidence was there. No leaves. Bare. Dead. For over forty years, my grandfather lived beneath that tree, and the year after he died, it ceased to exist as well. When my great-aunt learned of the tree's demise that even

rational members of the family regarded as “spooky,” she informed us once again that nature does grieve. A statement that would have previously gotten an eye roll from me now brought me a bit of comfort. Though logic warns me that it was likely a coincidence, the tree was where I first connected with my grandfather, and its death reminds me that I am not alone in my grief.

Ashley Bryant

Sweeping

Having to eat alone, I miss never running out of dish soap, aluminum foil, or laundry detergent; before, they always just appeared. I miss cooking, grocery shopping, and check day. I miss never having to worry about money. I miss hearing the same stories multiple times. I miss the continual stream of absolute It's the little things I miss. I miss drinking coffee together in the morning and junk that, once brought into my house, continued to appear, even after I insisted that, unlike the old saying, other people's trash was not our treasure. I miss the fighting, the insults, and even the silence. I miss the laughter, the love, and the devotion that did not require words between us. Mostly, I just miss him.

I've never been good with dates, so I don't remember the exact day we met. Elsie and Joyce, our younger sisters, were best friends, but since he was seven years older than I, we didn't grow up together. I remember him, though; I couldn't have been more than twelve or thirteen the first time I saw him. Mama told me to walk to his parents' house to get Elsie for supper, and when I knocked, he answered the door. He was at least twenty, and at thirteen, I thought he was the handsomest man I had ever seen. I've never been shy, and immediately, I started talking to him, asking him questions and showing him my southern charm. Though polite to the gangly teenage chatterbox, he soon became exasperated with my so called charm and sent me to the kitchen with his Mama. Walking home, I couldn't stop thinking about him, and that night, I told my older sister that I was going to marry him one day.

I didn't see him again until I was sixteen. By then, my preteen delusions had disappeared; I preferred dating real boys instead of ones I imagined. Mama woke me up

one morning to cook breakfast for my younger siblings, and after I was finished, she ordered me to sweep the porch because it hadn't been done in weeks. Thoughts of escape and freedom entered my mind as I was assigned another endless chore, but I knew from experience not to talk back to her. I was haphazardly sweeping the porch when I heard a car coming down our street. Our street was the best way to get to the mill where the men in our neighborhood worked, so I didn't find it unusual for someone to be out that early in the morning. I happened to glance up as the car passed, and I saw a man look at me and throw up his hand. I recognized him immediately, having spent a year volunteering to pick up Elsie from his parents' home until Daddy decided she was old enough to walk home alone. Though he was never visiting when I was there, I stared at the family picture each time I entered the hallway, studying his face carefully. By sixteen, I no longer thought about my previous crush, but the memories bombarded me when he waved. The next day, I voluntarily got out of bed to cook breakfast even though it was my older sister's turn. After cooking, I grabbed the broom and decided to sweep again. At the same time as the day before, he drove by and waved, but this time, I received a smile. For several months, this continued, and my sweeping became more elaborate. I begin to dress up and curl my hair; some days I even ventured into the yard to pick up sticks that Daddy wanted removed because well...I was such a helpful daughter.

On one particular summer morning, I put on my nicest red dress and decided to take a walk up the street. I knew this would get him to notice me if he hadn't before, yet I didn't consider how the rain from the previous day would affect my plan. He drove towards me as usual, ran into a puddle, drenched my lovely dress with mud, and sped

down the street. Even though I was horrified, I couldn't help but sweep for him the next morning, but his car never passed, leaving me with disappointment.

A few weeks later, I was shopping on Main Street with a friend, and I noticed him outside the barber shop. I decided to confront him, but when I marched up to him, he looked humiliated and immediately started apologizing for ruining my dress and fleeing from his embarrassment. Satisfied that he was being sincere, I sauntered down the street thinking how charmed I was by this man who was obviously so different from me. I decided that I would let him in on my not so secret feelings for him. I turned around, shouted his name, and whistled at him. He looked shocked, and I only smiled and waved as my friend dragged me home, telling me how inappropriate and unladylike my actions were; I never wanted to be a lady anyway. He called me that night and asked me if I wanted to get a hamburger or a milkshake sometime.

On the night of our first date, I was anxious since we had never really spent any time alone, but I was also ecstatic for the girl inside of me who had sworn that she would marry him one day. Mama and Daddy lectured me, telling me that if he was not from a good family, they would never allow me to go out with someone so much older. When he arrived, he was obviously nervous, too, probably not used to going out with girls who were so bold. While approaching our house, he tripped over the stairs, stubbed his toe, tumbled to the ground, and hollered out in pain. My whole family witnessed the scene, yet he managed to regain his composure immediately. He greeted everyone and led me to the car. We were both silent for the first few minutes until I chuckled and informed him that he looked ridiculous sprawled across my parents' yard. He glanced at me, laughed, and uttered that I was the most direct girl he had ever met. He admired my

spunk, no pretenses. Even years later, my family tells me that our first date was the day he fell for me, literally. We were married soon after I turned eighteen.

At twelve, most girls dream of marrying Prince Charming. Since my family was so poor, I never believed that someone would sweep me off my feet. If I wanted something or someone, I had to go after it myself. I guess it worked since I really did sweep my husband off of his feet by using my broom, curls, and enchanting red dress. I can't say our marriage was a fairy tale, either, but we stuck through it for over fifty years. Our personalities clashed at times. I was abrasive and confrontational while he was passive and sullen. We argued, yelled, and cried, but as hard as we fought, we loved just as strongly. We were devoted to one another, and I never doubted that he would do anything for me, our marriage, and our family.

It's still the little things I miss over a year later. I miss his presence during holidays with our two children and two grandchildren. I miss how I never had to change a light bulb or pump my own gas. I miss feeling secure in my own home. I miss seeing him working in his garden and sitting underneath his tree. I miss his generosity, kindness, and quiet nature. Mostly, I just miss him.

Cyberbullying: What Should Educators Do?

Technology has changed how our society communicates, and though many of the changes are positive, it has also affected how bullies intimidate their victims. For elementary, middle, and high school students, bullying is not a new phenomenon, yet in previous years, bullies relied on physical intimidation and the locality of the playground or classroom to accomplish their means. Though bullying is always harmful, in the past, victims could at least escape from their tormentors in the safety of their own homes. With the introduction of technology, bullies have found new ways to reach their victims, and they no longer have to be physically domineering. According to Darcy K. Lane, cyberbullying is “the intentional infliction of harm by the use of one or more media of electronic technologies, including, but not limited to, social-networking websites such as Facebook and MySpace, chat rooms, instant messaging, and cell phones” (1795). From the anonymity of these electronic devices, bullies can taunt their fellow peers outside the walls of the school, and the damage to a child’s emotional wellbeing can be just as harmful as a punch. Though educators may question what they can do about cyberbullying, teachers and administrators need to take responsibility by educating students and parents about this new practice, ensuring that their schools have anti-bullying policies that include cyberbullying, and monitoring student behavior for signs.

According to one study, twenty five percent of girls and eleven percent of boys in middle school have been cyberbullied at least once. Just as with regular bullying, cyberbullying generally begins in elementary school, is most prevalent in middle school, and declines throughout high school. While boys are more likely to bully their peers in the classroom, hallway, or playground, girls more often become cyberbullies since this

form of bullying does not require physical strength or intimidation (Beale and Hall 8-9). Even though cyberbullying does not require violence, the psychological effect on children who are victimized is just as real, especially since they may experience this harassment twenty-four hours a day. Students who are cyberbullied are more likely to stop attending school, dismiss school assignments, and become depressed. In recent years, many children who were cyberbullied even committed suicide. One thirteen-year-old boy in Vermont hanged himself after enduring months of Internet harassment from his peers (Stover 40-41). Cyberbullying has become widespread, based on other similar incidents, and educators need to become aware of these consequences and its various forms.

With a variety of electronic devices available in the information age, cyberbullying is not limited to one form. In fact, cyberbullies generally use six major technological tools to reach their victims. First, cyberbullies can send threatening emails to other students, and though emails can be tracked to a specific account, the sender can deny creating the message. Instant messaging, a method of communication that provides immediate responses between two people, is another device used by cyberbullies. Since screen names can be interchanged, instant messaging provides bullies the opportunity to harass their targets anonymously. Bash boards also allow instantaneous communication between groups of people, but on these boards, bullies can post hateful messages, whether true or false, for all Internet users to view. Websites can also be created or used to mock fellow students, and social networking websites, such as Facebook, are one of the most popular forms. The Internet also gives bullies the opportunity to create online voting polls, and students can easily create polls to vote for the ugliest or dumbest

students in the school (Beale and Hall 9). Though these five forms involve computers and the Internet, cyberbullies can also use cell phones to torment their peers. Not only can cell phones be used to send text messages, but they can also be used to take pictures. A bully might take a picture of another student undressing in the locker room and send it to others throughout the school (Stover 41). After recognizing the six forms, teachers must then ask themselves what can be done to prevent cyberbullying.

Though educators should attempt to prevent cyberbullying before it starts, many teachers and administrators question what they should do after it has occurred. According to Lane, one concern is the First Amendment since it protects students' rights to free speech. School officials may fear a lawsuit from bullies or their parents if the harassment happens from a computer or other electronic device not located on school grounds, and they may be cautious and not punish the acts. However, Lane insists that schools have the right to punish these students while still respecting the intention of the First Amendment (1793-1794). In the past, the Supreme Court has issued decisions on the regulation of free speech in schools. The most conclusive decision on the rights of schools to punish students for speech was *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* in 1969. Even though it was long before the dawn of the technological age, it can still be used to support anti-cyberbullying policies. While the ruling stated that students do not lose their right to free speech when they enter the school, the Supreme Court also included two exceptions to the legislation. Any act that "substantially disrupts the working of the school" or "infringes on the rights of other students" will not be tolerated (Lane 1798-1799). Based on this statement, schools have a strong case for punishing students who cyberbully. If educators keep careful

documentation, they can argue that cyberbullying both violates victims' rights and disrupts learning, even if the action occurs outside the school. Schools can also look to rulings from lower-courts, and the majority of cases involving cyber-bullying use the *Tinker* decision to support legislation against it (Lane 1805-1806). Even though schools have the right to punish students for cyberbullying, the best policies include prevention.

To prevent cyberbullying, schools should begin by educating students.

Counselors can work with classroom teachers to build programs and even lessons designed around the topic. Students should also be made aware of the punishments for this type of behavior, and teachers should stress that it will be taken as seriously as other forms of bullying. Students should also be informed about procedures for reporting it, if they do become victims, and educators should also ensure that their districts' policies on bullying include cyberbullying. Parents should be provided with information, and they should be encouraged to teach their children about Internet safety at home. Currently, forty-five states have passed legislation that forbids all forms of electronic bullying, but educators can research their states and petition them to add electronic bullying to current policies, if it is not included (Beale and Hall 10-11). Though preventative measures will not stop cyberbullying completely, educating students and parents is beneficial, and with the current legislation, students can be punished if they act as cyberbullies.

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Kenny Clevenger



"And the moral of the story is that you don't remember what happened. What you remember becomes what happened."

-- John Green

Where I'm From

I am from Saturday mornings filled with cartoons,
from Marvel Comics and the DC Universe.
I am from the "big hole" in the backyard.
(Sweaty, laughing, running arms filled with toys.)
I am from the thorny splinters, the poison oak
I am from long afternoons under shade trees,
From my dad's side, my mom's arms, and my brother's gaze.
I'm from nights spent rolling on the den floor as my dad read the phone book aloud and
mornings watching quietly as my mom ironed every article of clothing anyone in our
house chose to wear.
From "Be good to your brother!" and "Love what you do."
I am from "The Lord answers prayers!" – a quiet reminder that I am never truly alone.
I'm from Alabama by way of Germany and Poland,
A history of conquest and controversy.
I am from Pork Chops and Scalloped Potatoes, Sausages and Sauer Kraut.
From the adventures of my mamaw, Flossie the WAC, the farm-world practicality of my
granny, Mollie Ruth, and the suffocating hugs of my perfumed aunt Carnie.
I am from Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot,
From foggy gas-lit city streets and mysterious passenger trains.
I am from there and here and all places in between
I am from pages of a book still being written
In pen, by hand, on paper.

The Six Cons of the Box

As I began to analyze teaching “outside the box,” I realized that I was really analyzing the Box itself. I began creating a strategy not unlike a battle plan. The enemy was clearly the Box. My allies were all surrounding said Box, and I decided that the natural thing a good general should do was to define that enemy. Like any cube, the Box that I oppose is made up of six sides, and upon deeper inspection, I can see that each represents a Con – a multifaceted, multi-syllabic indicator of some natural deficiency in “Boxed” teachers. Those six cons are conformity, consternation, confoundedness, convolution, constriction, and contentedness. The six weapons of my enemy are guardians of a complacency that I cannot understand, but each is extremely dangerous.

The Box uses conformity as its first defense. Conformity is a safety net for so many people – we don’t want to be seen as different or strange – that the Box has little trouble getting people to believe the lie that conformity offers safety. Such lies are only aided by consternation, which adds a layer of dissolution to the problem at hand. Consternation is reinforced by the partners confoundedness and convolution who rely heavily on the abilities of their good friend constriction. This trio works to keep their enemies in the dark, effectively denying them any recourse other than despair. Finally, if a person somehow finds his way through the many divisions of this fateful three, he will find himself faced with the most dangerous enemy of all: contentedness. The dangers of being content are evident to most teachers, but others find themselves entranced by the false security of contentedness. Disguised as happiness, this ingenious con infuses itself

into a teacher's soul and has the ability to stop the learning process and any creativity that might come with it.

Having defined my enemy, I have now been able to fortify my defenses against this foe, this Box. I have been able to prepare myself against the Cons that await any teacher who seeks to encourage, to entertain, to enlighten his students. The weapons of my arsenal include bravery, kindness, reason, clarity, openness, and zeal. But the Box isn't leaving; it waits patiently because it can. The choice that is represented by the Box is the easiest choice anyone can make. It is the choice to be idle, to be stagnant. Teaching "Outside the Box" is often difficult because we have to work to get beyond that Box. But difficult choices are not necessarily the worst choices to make.

Six Feet Deep

Why do you insist on trying so hard not to change?

What satisfaction – what glory –

Do you find in being right in your wrongness?

You revel

In Unwillingness, Abstinence, Abhorrence

To change.

Yet your results show a need – a necessity –

For a change

In you, in your work, in your product.

You stand alone, staring with cold, empty eyes

Through the holes in the box of your rigidness,

Holes made by pleading voices begging you to hear,

And you smile a dead smile,

Murdered by complacency,

Not even knowing

Your box that keeps you safe is slowly

Being lowered into the ground.

Using Pop Culture to Access Classic Literature:

Tennyson's "Ulysses" and Superheroes

One of the most difficult challenges of the modern language arts classroom is getting students to identify with classic literature. Many students view classics as antiquated and difficult, and these students therefore stop short of connecting with the literature. According to Lamiaa Youssef, this disconnect represents a breakdown in "thematic relevance," which suggests that students desire a connection to the literature that they read, but those same students cannot identify with the classics if those texts do not offer some universal truth that has common cross-cultural implications. Students in my own classroom have often struggled with this very idea, and I subsequently set out to find a way to help my students discover that connection. As a result, I have found great success using elements of pop culture to make connections with classic literary texts.

For the purposes of this essay, *pop culture* refers to any fictional character or text from the contemporary world that students have a clear knowledge of. Our world is not a world devoid of literature; it is not a world in which stories or storytelling cannot be found. On the contrary, stories are all around us. Our students live in a world in which they are constantly bombarded with stories. Movies, videos, television, and digital media all play a role in the lives of our students today. This framework does not, therefore, have to be established by the teacher. Instead, I seek to use the framework that is already in place to aid my students in identifying with classic literature.

To help my twelfth grade students grasp British literature, I carry them through several lessons using pop culture references as a fulcrum. I often begin by comparing heroes like Beowulf from Anglo-Saxon literature to professional wrestlers from the contemporary world. The outlandish bravado of these characters is a stock characteristic

familiar to the majority of young people today. Viewing the self-gratifying speeches of Beowulf in this manner often gives my students a sense of the character that helps them connect to the text itself. Likewise, I often pair medieval ballads with modern songs from my students' own play lists. Jonathan Ostenson and Elizabeth Gleason-Sutton champion this idea in their study seeking to open classic literature to their students by suggesting that "[i]f we were going to excite our students' passions about this book, we would need to connect it more explicitly to their interests, to their lives and concerns" (38). However, these texts discussed earlier have never really presented themselves as overly problematic for my students. Only after these first few forays into British literature do my students seem to become mired down in the language and subject matter of the classic literature we study.

As I began to contemplate the reasons for this stagnation that occurs typically after the first two units each semester, I realized that not all of the literature was out of reach for my students. Though the sonnets of the Renaissance were difficult, the lyrical poetry of the same period seemed to resonate with my audience. Poets like Robert Herrick and Andrew Marvell never seemed to cause many problems for my students, so I began to try to make sense of these facts. In "A Matter of Relevance: Teaching Classics in the 21st Century," Lamiaa Youssef points to Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" as an example of a poem that bridges the gap for modern students. Youssef suggests that the themes inherent in this poem are understandable for modern young people because they are the themes of modern youthful existence. This suggestion gave fuel to my idea that I needed to find a way to make other classic pieces relatable for my students.

Thus, I found myself falling back on pop culture references every time we read a text in class. And out of these references came the lessons that I now use as a core for my twelfth grade classes, lessons that make connections between the alien world of classic literature and the familiar world of pop culture.

One of the most successful lessons from this group is focused on Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses." This poem marks the first time my students have dealt with dramatic monologues, and this concept is often difficult for my students to understand. As a mode, dramatic monologue is the ideal device to use when teaching Victorian literature because it represents the self-consciousness inherent in the period so well. At this point in the course, my students would have just finished a unit focused on the openness and confessional nature of Romantic poetry. The contrasting voices found in many Victorian poems often manifest as obscure and disconnected for my students.

I begin this lesson with a discussion about heroism. Ostenson and Gleason-Sutton have explored the use of such "essential questions" in their own research as well (37). In "Making the Classics Matter to Students through Digital Literacies and Essential Questions," these two veteran educators suggest that these questions can "help our students make meaningful connections" with classic literature (37). Matt Copeland likewise employs such open-ended questions to spark discussions in a format he calls the "Socratic circle" (29). Copeland, however, allows students to organically move through discussion for the sake of discussing the question (30). For this lesson, I choose a more active role.

To build upon the discussion of heroism in my own classroom, I ask students to pick their favorite superhero from pop culture. At this point, students are instructed to

write a letter from the point of view of the hero as he or she nears retirement. I allow my students to contemplate the hero's hopes and dreams for the future or what might be included in a personal message to specific friends or acquaintances. The main point is that the letter must be written in the hero's voice, not the student's voice. After allowing time for the letters to be written, I call the class back together, and each letter is read for the class. The result of this part of the lesson is usually very interesting. Students begin to see that when a writer takes on the voice of a character, he or she is speaking through that character. This is especially interesting for students who have written from the same hero's point of view. Since the resulting letters are inherently different based upon the different student writers, a discussion naturally follows about the reasons for this difference.

At this point, I lead a discussion connecting the student letter writing to the idea of dramatic monologues. Since these letters have been written in the voice of a character, they represent dramatic monologues in prose format. The benefit of requiring students to complete this assignment before discussing the term *dramatic monologue* is found in inquiry. By actively taking part in the creation of a proto-dramatic monologue, students are able to formulate their own ideas about what a writer does when creating such a poem; consequently, students can more easily make informed statements about a writer's motives for speaking through a character. This type of exploration is similar to the Socratic method, in which questions give rise to more questions that lead to some answers and even more questions. Much research has been done in this area, and researcher Matt Copeland suggests that one benefit of getting students to formulate questions is that they learn "to evaluate the quality of discussion not only in others but

also in themselves” (19). Such evaluation is a necessary part of connecting to classic literature.

Next, we transition into a first reading of Tennyson’s “Ulysses.” I typically perform this first foray into the poem as a dramatic reading. The focus at this point is on the character Ulysses and his voice. As a second reading activity, I have the students read in groups, looking for rhetorical appeals that shed light on Ulysses’s motivations. This poem lends itself very easily to an analysis based upon the areas of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. Groups then share their findings with the class, and a third reading is conducted. This time, groups look for connotations, images, and shifts that speak to the poem’s theme. Once these activities have been completed, I bring the class back together for a full-class discussion of universal ideas made apparent through this analysis. Students often point to the idea of perseverance as a theme in the poem. They recognize the natural desire of the superhero that is Ulysses to persist in the face of old age and fatigue.

And here is the light bulb moment for so many of my students: The character Ulysses is a hero who is faced with possible retirement, but he chooses adventure over such stagnation because his own personality will not allow him to do otherwise. In the same way, many of the heroes from the letter writing activity at the beginning of this lesson had been struggling with this issue. Students immediately make a connection with Ulysses, based upon their understanding of their own chosen heroes. Furthermore, students are open now to a discussion concerning Tennyson’s role in the voice of the character Ulysses. Because my students spoke through their own heroes in the letter

writing activity, they now make connections with Tennyson's initial motivations as he speaks through Ulysses in his poem.

This is but one of the many lessons that I use that hinges upon pop culture in my twelfth grade classroom. Since I began using these references, I have seen numerous benefits. Not only do my students understand classic literature in a new way, but they also make connections that enable them to build upon previous knowledge. Their subsequent analytical endeavors are more informed and have a clearer voice. By gaining an understanding of an author's voice, my students are able to give more thought to their own voices as writers. Jim W. Corder calls this "generative *ethos*," (97) meaning that students create their own "self-authenticating language" (94). The goal of all literature classrooms is to teach such connections as these, connections that give students the ability to stand on their own as writers.

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Rachael Couch

Fusing Tradition with Technology "Outside the Box"

"The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars." —Jack Kerouac

"Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently -- they're not fond of rules... You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things... they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do." —Steve Jobs



Fortune Cookies

My grandmother hated fortune tellers. I'm surprised she let me watch *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?* when I was a kid. Her religious views bordered on fanatic; when the church doors were open, she was there. I grew up being taught to fear God, not revel in Him. So, it was only natural that when she died, I turned from God. I have since found Him again, and I know that silly superstitions and fortunes told on papers hidden inside cookies are just for fun. I won't burn in a lake of fire and brimstone for finding enjoyment in them, which is why I loved pondering my fortune cookie paper this evening. Here's what transpired.

For quite some time, I've been considering my place in this world. Do I *really* want to retire a teacher? What happened to all of those dreams of becoming a writer? What about that available college teaching job? Should I apply for it? Why can't *I* be the person to find a bag of money floating in a creek in Colorado and be allowed to keep it? I could open my own bakery/coffee shop/teacher supply store. Ramblings on a carousel in my head are what these questions are.

After I finished my supper—that's what we call the third meal of the day in our house. (Dinner is the second meal)—I turned to Hanah, who was the fortune cookie distributor of the evening. She made sure all three cookies had paper inside them, holding them up and peeking through the folded crust. She had recently gotten one without a fortune in it, and we had a good laugh about it. When she handed me a cookie, I said, "You realize you just decided my fate, don't you?" In her fifteen-year-old snobbery, she simply said, "I just handed you a cookie." With a sigh and a look over my glasses and down my nose, we opened our cookies.

Emma was first. Hanah had been griping at her all evening, saying she talked too much and that she got on her nerves. Emma is eleven and asks about eleven questions a minute; it's her mission in life to annoy her older sister. The message in Emma's fortune cookie read, "Don't underestimate yourself. Your social skills are needed by others at this time." I found great joy in telling Emma that there is a reason she's so bubbly and curious. Emma has finally begun to *want* to be a girl...brushing her hair without being told, telling me we need to go bra shopping for her, wanting her first pedicure, and confiding in me that she's tired of her baby fat.

Next came Hanah's turn. Hers was pretty simple: "Visit a park. Enjoy what nature has to offer." This did *not* make Hanah happy. She stays in her cave often with the lights off and curtains closed. She chose to earn money this summer by babysitting the boys three days a week while I'm gone to JSUWP, and she has been forced to be social, even sitting by the pool—under the shade of the umbrella, of course—while the boys and Emma swim. I suggested that maybe fate was telling her to get outside and actually *look* at how wonderful it is in the daylight. She mumbled something about how she's been *very* social this summer. When I mentioned it was likely because she was getting *paid*, she had no response.

Finally, it was my turn. "Turn your thoughts within—find yourself." Inwardly, I thought how appropriate my fortune was; outwardly, I had to listen to Hanah about how stupid hers was and how Emma and I got these great fortunes. *Blah Blah Blah*. Emma had already stopped listening and was barking orders to Jefferson in the living room about a television show she wasn't even watching. Hanah then disappeared; she goes into ninja mode when she wants to be alone and finds a way to leave the room without

anyone is realizing she's gone. Earlier during supper, she revealed to me that she wants to be a private detective when she grows up. She actually said "detector" and then stopped herself because she knew that wasn't the right word. I simply pointed out that detectors chirp loudly when they sense smoke, and we both chuckled at her fuddled word use.

I was left to sit back and smile at how accurate our fortune cookies were at relating to what we needed to hear tonight. Hanah simply doesn't want to face the reality of her teen angst and shallowness. Emma just wants to know she fits in. And I am just me. I constantly question my motives when it comes to my teaching. I can easily say that I was forced into it, that I hadn't planned on being a teacher at all. I didn't get an undergraduate degree in education; I was going to be a writer.

Yet, when I look at myself as a teacher, I realize that I *think* I'm good at it. A person might come into my room to observe and see controlled chaos. My classroom is loud and energetic and spastic. Sometimes I wonder why I punish myself with projects. Then, I have to realize that it isn't for me. It's for the kids. I don't sit at my desk. Period. I am exhausted when I go home each day. I complain silently about how I have to grade all of the projects I assign, but I don't know how to teach without them.

I had one student, only one, tell me on the last day of class this year, that I'm the best English teacher he's ever had. I questioned his motives; he failed due to absences, but he still told me that. All I could think to tell him was that I hope he learned something. I didn't feel connected to my students this year as in years past. I am ignored completely when I see students in my community. The last two times I saw students who

spoke and waved, they were students from my previous school. I crave that recognition. I want to know I made a difference in a kid's life. I don't feel that since I transferred.

I transferred for my family's sake. For Conner's sake. Deep down, I know I need to stay put. It's best for my family. But is it best for them when I'm clearly unhappy? I don't want them to feel the negative vibes I have. Why can't I just get over it? I can make this work, right? I saw a quote on Pinterest last night. It simply said, "The reason people find it so hard to be happy is that they always see the past better than it was and the present worse than it is." I'm quite sure there's medication for this, but I don't want to mask the problem. I want to get rid of it.

Patterns Are Important

Patterns are important. Sequences. Repetitiveness. Order. Structure. Routine.

I am different. Sometimes I wish my family could see inside my head. The so called “experts” call it sensory overload. I have a microcosm—a little world; a world in miniature—a universe of information inside my head. Sometimes I can’t decide what to do with it all, so I just reach up and pick something out of the air. I focus on that until I have it memorized. Its mannerism. Its order. Its sequence—the following of one thing after another; succession—. Everything. I make movies come to life when I say them out loud. It makes me happy.

Sometimes, when I don’t know what to say, I use lines from movies. Or I sing, but that only happens when I’m excited about something. When I’m upset, I cry. I scream. I throw things. I repeat movie lines about some character who is having the same emotion. I don’t throw things much. Only when people aren’t listening to me. If I don’t get what I want, I say it louder. In a more forceful manner. When that doesn’t work, I throw things. I don’t throw things to hurt people. I just don’t know how to express myself with my words. If what I say doesn’t cause someone to act on my words, then I said the wrong thing, right?

My brother is my best friend. He plays with me. Sometimes he doesn’t do what I want him to do, and I get mad. He loves me so much, so he tries to do the things I want to do. He plays video games, and I have learned to take turns with choosing the songs I want to hear when he plays games. He shares with me. I love to dance! He will dance with me, and I will move like the people do on the TV screen, but I don’t want to hold a remote. I just want to dance. Sometimes, when no one is looking, I will sit down and

hold the remote in my hands and try to make the game work. But when it doesn't, I get mad.

I wonder sometimes, what other people think. I want them to understand me and why I act the way I do. My brother speaks for me a lot. I don't really have to say much when he's around. But sometimes, I like to be all by myself. I like being alone. I can entertain myself with my little world better than anyone. When I line up my cars, sometimes my brother wants to help me, but I won't let him. I have them in a perfect order. A sequence. A pattern—a combination of qualities, acts, tendencies, etc., forming a consistent or characteristic arrangement—. When I line them up, he pushes one out of line on purpose. My mommy does that, too, but I know she's just playing with me to see if I'll notice.

I heard Mommy telling Jefferson that I learn differently than he does. I heard her tell Jefferson that I'm autistic—a pervasive developmental disorder of children, characterized by impaired communication, excessive rigidity, and emotional detachment: now considered one of the autism spectrum disorders—I am different. I am a child. I am a twin. I am smart. I have autism.

I've been reading for a while now. I start big school soon, but I know it will be hard for me. Something new. Something different. Something scary. I'll be okay, but I'm going to be pretty mad for a while. I might run away. I do that when I'm upset. Or happy. Or curious. Or playful. The last time I ran away, I knew where to go. I wanted my blue flowers. Mommy and Daddy wouldn't let me have them when we were walking. I ran outside when Mommy was getting something out of the van. She wasn't looking. I ran. She caught me down the road a piece and thwarted—to oppose

successfully; prevent from accomplishing a purpose—my escape. I was mad that she caught me. I was able to tell her, “I need blue flowers!” but she still didn’t let me get them.

I kept my shoes on. I usually take them off as soon as I get home. I remembered where the blue flowers were. Around the corner. In the waving people’s yard. Not far. I kept them on because I thought maybe someone wouldn’t be looking and I could get away again.

I am different. I see the world in a vibrant—moving to and fro rapidly; vibrating—way. I am fearless.

*All defined terms are from <http://www.dictionary.com>

Overheard Post Office Talk.

I walked into the post office of TinyTown, USA, yesterday, straight into a conversation between another customer and the woman behind the counter. There was a small, wiry man chatting it up about 'kids these days' and about how if we could fix five little things, there would no longer be a need for fences and locked doors. He had that ex-military feel about him...I can usually spot these guys a mile away. They carry themselves differently than everyone else. I know. I was raised by one, and I now live with one...my better half. This little man, ironically, reminded me of my grandfather who was a Goodyear man. Their statures were similar: shirt tucked in neatly, belt, intelligent eyes, mild manner, a sense of purpose .

Why was this conversation interesting to me? Post Office Woman said that Wiry Man should call the government and tell them his ideas about what will fix society. I made the statement that the higher up folks didn't want to hear what small town America had to say. Somehow, that observation was warped into Post Office Woman saying that what I meant to say was that we're all just ignorant hicks as far as everyone else is concerned...of course, it was all light-hearted in context...we three chuckled about it. Then, Wiry Man said something that really made me take a look at myself. Here's what he said...

He said that intelligence really didn't make that much sense...that somehow education made smart folks stupid. He elaborated that his wife has a master's in Psychology...since she's had her degree, she looks at the world differently. She seems to have forgotten how to have a normal conversation with people, (Post Office Woman interjects and says she has all book sense and no common sense) . Wiry Man agreed in a

sense...he said she just can't accept that some people will never change and that she can't make that happen. He said that no matter how much higher her education is, she can't change what doesn't want to change. He said she's more negative about the ways of the world now...she can't see value in what people have...she only sees what's wrong.

He shouted his good-byes and left Post Office Woman and me pondering the things he said...well, I was pondering...I can't speak for Post Office Woman. I bought a book of stamps and left without mailing the other item that had taken me to the post office in the first place. I wanted so badly to ask Wiry Man's name...the nature of small towns meant that I could simply ask someone at school, and they could tell me who he was, where he worked, what his education was, and who all was related to him. I'll just have to accept that Wiry Man will remain a mystery to me. A curiosity that sparked a blog post.

I started to wonder if I'm isolating myself behind my own education...do I really do that? I have so much energy poised at finding faults in people, students especially, that I've lost the green pasture completely. Wiry Man said that there are days when his wife is griping and complaining about something and he has NO IDEA what she's talking about. I instantly thought about my husband...he says that about me sometimes. He just muddles through the conversation and forgets about the word he's never heard before.

When he was preparing to leave for work this morning, I asked him if he thought I'd changed since I got my master's degree. He said yes. He told me that to him, he thinks I hate kids. That the two upstairs (my girls) usually got the bad end of the deal because I take out my frustrations from a day dealing with students on their heads...about little things. I admitted that I've apologized to them for doing exactly that. He also said

that I choose words that most people don't understand to say something where a simple word would be just as easy to use...(almost exactly what Wiry Man said about his own wife)...he isn't sure if I've done that my whole life or not; he can only speak about since we've known each other.

I said that little quirk of mine is my father's fault. I was raised to speak in that manner by a man who didn't finish college. I feel like Tom Hanks on *You've Got Mail*. The point when he says, "Do you ever feel you've become the worst version of yourself? That a Pandora's box of all the secret, hateful parts—your arrogance, your spite, your condescension—has sprung open?" Were I to look through someone else's eyes at me, what would I see? Would I be happy about it? Would I be able to change it at all?

Would I see a snob who looks down her nose at people on an intellectual level? Would I see someone starved for meaty conversation? Would I see a lonely woman desperately clinging to her useless knowledge? Would I see a braggart who MUST know more than everyone else? I know what I would NOT see...I wouldn't see ME anymore. She's been gone a while.

Mary Jo Cox

Don't listen to those who say you're taking too big a chance, Michelangelo would have painted the Sistine floor, and it surely would be rubbed out by today. Most important, don't listen when the little voice of fear inside you rears its ugly head and says, "They're all smarter than you out there."



"They're more talented, they're taller, blonder, prettier, luckier, and they have connections." I firmly believe that if you follow a path that interests you, not to the exclusion

of love, sensitivity, and cooperation with others, but love with the strength of conviction that you can move others by your own efforts, and do not make success or failure the criteria by which you live, the chances are you'll be a person worthy of your own respects."

-Neil Simon

Where I'm From

I am from a book,
from music, and dancing.

I am from a rich, ethnic American home,
traditions, stories, family.

I am from the sunflower,
the palm tree
whose roots are deep to weather the storm,
and bear fruit
for others to be nourished.

I am from Kalachy,
from Polish stoneware and wycinanki (vee-chee-non-key).

I am from the Gielarowski, Jastrebski, and Lendski clans
proud of who we are, solidarity, patriots.

I am from St. Mary's,
small, catholic, maternal.

I am from the "everyone talks at the same time,"
always has a story to tell paternal side.

I am from Mary Lee's bakery,
creations of art for the palate,
recipes of wonder, talents unnoticed.

I am from my mother's arms,
reading, writing, expressions of love.
You can be whatever you want to be,

go to college.

I am the middle child of six,
Seamstress, shoes sales clerk, theatre,
commercials, tv news, teaching at home.

I am from a love story,
tall, dark, handsome, romantic,
beautiful voice sings to my heart.

I am from the rich blend of
what was and what can be,
flavored with mellow moments with friends.

I am from memories of our babies
Sweet smelling, redheaded, blonde and brunette,

Fishing, Christmas,
reading in bed on cold winter days,
Sunburnt from the pool,
gifts of homemade treasures.

I am not finished
New ideas, technology, students to love
and memories to make.

The Polish Baker

It was perfect weather for a funeral, not gushing rain that competed with the endless tears, but a steady drip, drip, drip, as if to remind me he is gone, gone, gone. I was neither cold nor wet, but emotionless and parched. I had never been without my father, never been further than a phone call away. I will miss his voice; I will miss him. It was just three days ago on Father's Day when I placed my new born baby into his loving arms. He spoke to her softly in Polish, kissed her tiny head and handed her back to me. Did I thank him for loving me? Did I thank him for teaching me so many wonderful things? Did I remember to tell him I love him? The pain of his leaving hurts.

Someone touched my hand. The numbness reluctantly passed from my mind, and the misty fog lifted to reveal my surroundings. I stood in line, between my older and younger sisters. The hand that revived me from my sorrow was gently shaking me back into the funeral home. "Thank you for coming," I heard my voice whisper, "I'm sorry, how did you know my father?" Another face I did not recognize. "Are these people in the wrong room?" I murmured to my sister. "No," she replied they all knew dad.

Each story I heard was different, and yet, they all had a central character, my father. Apparently, he did more than bake when he went to the family bakery in the wee hours of the morning. I listened with fascination to wonderful stories about acts of kindness by a man I knew as my daddy.

He always had a listening ear for me, especially when I was in college suffering from chronic homesickness. I would call collect, sit in the closet so I wouldn't disturb my roommate and talk to my dad for hours. Or, at least until I stopped crying when he

reminded me I could do this because I was a Gielarowski. I knew my Polish father had a generous heart and was kind to everyone he met, but there were so many people at his funeral that none of my family knew that we began to wonder if we knew him at all. He was secretly helping people and asking them not to tell anyone. If this was a small sampling of all the people he had helped, there could be many more that we will never know about.

When there was a gap in the line of mourners, I peeked down the line to see who had stopped the flow of people. My mother was engrossed in the words of a young couple. As she wiped the tears streaming down her face, the couple took turns telling her details of how they knew my father. When they seemed to be finishing their tale, I watched the young man put an envelope in my mother's hand. The line began to move again, and the couple made their way to me. When the young man gripped my hand, his voice choked with emotion and heartfelt sympathy; his wife hugged me the same way she did my mother and said, "We will miss your father, so very much." I held her hand, and gently guided her to the corner of the room. I asked her to share with me how she had met my father. Her story began several months prior to my father's passing. The couple were newly married and had packed all their belongings to begin college near our family bakery. On the last leg of their journey to our small town, while they were spending the night in a motel, the small U-Haul trailer that contained everything they owned had been stolen. Discouraged and heartbroken the young couple continued their trip to our small town. They arrived before daybreak and looked for some place to rest until the college campus would open. They noticed the only lights on during that time of the morning was in my father's bakery. The door was open, as my father liked to have visitors at all hours

during the night, and he invited the young couple to come in and have a fresh hot doughnut and coffee. The young woman stopped her story to look at my face with wonderment in her eyes, "It was as if he was waiting for us," she confessed, "It seemed like he knew we were coming and told us not to worry that everything would be all right." She finished by telling me Dad had lent them some money to help them get set up in their new apartment, and told them they could pay it back when possible. They were going by the bakery to repay my father when they learned that he had passed away.

The mourners at my father's funeral were from all walks of life. Each had a unique story to tell, and was grateful to have the opportunity to share how one man made a difference in his or her life. The Polish baker with a generous heart had touched many lives. My father was a hardworking, thoughtful, kind, and charitable person. As we left the funeral home that evening, my mother gently deposited the letters, envelopes, and cash into her handbag; she would read these tributes in the company of her own private memories.

Two years earlier, my father came out of retirement to open a small bakery in a college town in Wilmore, Kentucky. During those years, my father's bakery was the stopping place for each new student with a lonely heart, young couples who needed advice, farmers who needed encouragement, and homeless travelers who needed a meal. He loaned money to whomever told him their hard luck story, and we were amazed at how many people returned the borrowed money back to my mother.

It was so hard for me to tell my father goodbye that summer day. But as I look back, I realize I wasn't alone. Joe, the Polish Baker, will be missed by many.

Mom to Son

Whenever I see your face,
After the sun rises in the morning,
Before we eat breakfast,
As I glance at your messy hair,
I remember dreaming of a little boy just like you.
When I see how much you can eat,
While you drink the last of the milk,
Who could blame me for counting the cost,
Although I think you are priceless.
I want you to know, I am proud to be your mother.

Mary Cox

December, 2011

Dear Susie,

Well, you have given me a lot to think about. You listed a few good reasons why you should not believe in me in your last letter. Perhaps, it's not as important that you believe in me; maybe it's more important for you to know that I believe in you. I understand why you think your mother may have crunched up those crackers and spilled out the water that you left for me. Why would a grown woman go to so much trouble to try to fool her little girl? What is the point in make-believe? Why is it important for people, not just children, to believe in something that seems impossible?

Your imagination is a unique, and a wonderful gift from God. Learning how to use the imagination is what good parents teach their children. It took great imaginations to believe that people could govern themselves. That's how America became a country. It took imagination to get in a small ship and travel for several months to a land where no one knew what to expect. It took a wonderful imagination to board a tiny ship to cross an ocean. It took courage to overcome fear of the unknown. It took an imagination to dream of a good place, a wonderful new home, and a blessed future. Those first American families had no idea what to expect. What do you think the parents told their children? Do you suppose those parents had to imagine what life could be like in the new world and then paint a beautiful picture with words to tell their children so that they were not afraid, but, rather, excited about what they might find in the new world? They had to trust their parents.

Another time, people used their courage to travel west to California. Don't you think they used their imaginations to picture that part of the country as fruitful and

beautiful? In a similar way, your great, great, great grandfather used his imagination to believe that there were beautiful mountains and lush river valleys just a few hundred miles down a particular river. He chose to explore that river with the help of two other men. What was he thinking? What did he imagine could be down that river? It must have been something wonderful because he got in that boat and kept going down river until he saw something that looked like his imagined place. He had no idea what was beyond each curve in the river, but he kept going until he saw something that looked familiar. One day he made a camp, and after staying in that one spot for several days, he may have thought that this was the spot that he had imagined and this was where he would build a home for his family. That beautiful spot would later become Guntersville, Alabama.

Your great, great grandfather must have believed he could do the same as his father. One day, he decided to travel from the small village of Albertville to look for a new home for his wife and newborn. I suspect, with faith and inspiration from God, he followed his heart and imagination over the next mountain. He found a small valley, not far from his parents, where he would build a large home for his growing family; he named his new home Cox Gap, where you live today.

Susie, you have a rich heritage of men and women who have gone before you that used their imaginations fortified by their courage to believe in something they could not see. Learn how to use your imagination like your grandfathers. Learn to think big. There are hundreds of thousands of ideas that have not been thought about yet!

I know for a fact that, your mother used her imagination to believe she could be a teacher. She imagined her love and skills could be used to teach children how to use their

imaginations to think about all the possibilities in life. Learn to believe in something bigger than yourself; at the same time, choose to believe in the small miracles of life. That's why your mom and dad decided to give me to you as a present. I just happened to be a wonderful idea to help a very special little girl learn about the importance of using her imagination to believe that life is wonderful.

You, like your sisters and goofy brother, were imagined by your parents before you were ever conceived. They talked about each one of you, as they waited for you to be born. They wondered about what each of you would look like, guessed what talents each of you would have, and most of all, they took the time to pray and plan for each one of you. Learn to believe, Susie, especially when no one else has the courage to do so. Believe that you have the faith to endure the good times, as well as, trust to make it through the hard times.

You have a choice. You can choose to write me back, and we will go on believing that miracles and wonderful things can happen just because we believe. Or, you can not do anything.... I will know that you don't want to continue with this make believe anymore. Just like so many things in life... You have a choice.

But always remember,

I believe in you!

With much affection and love,

Eloise, your Christmas elf

***This is the last letter written to my daughter during a three year period when she believed a Christmas elf visited her during the month of December. Each night Susie would write a letter to Eloise and in the morning she would hunt for Eloise's reply. Childhood is a special time to learn many important lessons in life. Susie and I have wonderful memories of visits from Eloise and lessons learned about faith, trust, and innocence.**



Diversity Assignment: Personal Reflection

Sardis High School is a rural county school. The community in and around Sardis City consists of predominantly hard working, Christian, family-oriented, proud people. It is not uncommon for some students to be fifth or sixth generation descendants of the counties founding homesteaders from the early nineteenth century. Most students consider themselves to be of "country" origin, or in some cases, they call themselves "rednecks." I consider these students to be part of our rich American farm culture. Some of the students in my practicum class work on family farms and occasionally have forgotten to change their work boots for school. It is not uncommon for the teacher to ask those students to take off their boots and place them outside the classroom door. Farm smells are best left on the farm.

My personal strengths, thanks in part to my upbringing, infused in me an appreciation for ethnicity, diversity, and common sense. As Americans, we come from diverse backgrounds, but share one important common denominator among us all, liberty. The Sardis Community exemplifies a strong American voice for expressing family pride, religious belief, and national patriotism.

I did not come to this classroom with preconceived notions of what these students might or might not be. I came to this classroom expecting to acquire a better understanding for these young Americans who happen to live in my community. I much prefer to focus on the commonalities that we possess as Americans; we are teachers and students at Sardis High School with a mutual goal for excellence in academics. My personal philosophy is that my role is to train students to honor those who are different from themselves without judging which is better or worse. Perhaps,

we as educators are spending too much time focusing on our differences instead of honoring those differences to create unity. I much prefer to highlight the similarities, those things that make us alike such as love of country, respect for community, and honor for those who have gone before us. Once these commonalities are understood and supported by students, then, and only then, should we begin to point out our diverse upbringings, religious beliefs, ethnicity, or politics. Current research suggests whatever a human mind focuses on will be magnified in that person's life. I prefer to help others understand that true diversity can be found in the subtle differences each individual possesses regardless of race, gender or nationality. I do not support the notion that all students should be treated the same; they are not the same.

For example, I have enjoyed learning about each individual student in my practicum class. There were 34 students in one class with each student having a unique need. While making the most of my teaching practicum, I used the times before and after class to talk to each student during this semester. During this time, I learned several things. There are two artists in this class with lots of talent; however, the school does not have an art teacher, so they work on their own. I asked about their drawings every week and was honored when they brought their art work in for my perusal. There are many students in this class that are bused to the technical school each day of the week. I made it a point to ask each of these students about their likes or dislike in regard to the skills they were learning at the technical school. They shared projects they had been working on, problems they were trying to solve, and creative ideas they had yet to begin. I looked them in the eye while they spoke to me, and hoped they could sense my sincere interest in their achievements. These students

did not like to read and write, but they loved to imagine and create. They are different from the typical high school students portrayed in musicals. Most will not go to college, but they will learn a skill which will help them secure a good job. They will be okay.

It has always been my personal choice not to listen to what someone tells me about another person. Life experiences will teach that people respond differently to various people. I have found it best to make up my own mind about people, and that includes students.

As with my practicum experience, my focus continues to be to help students discover their natural talents within the frame work of who they already are.

Delilah Darden



*“To him whose elastic and
vigorous thought keeps pace with
the sun, the day is a perpetual
morning.”*

--Henry David Thoreau

Front Porch Lessons

How to peel apples and dry them in the sun

How patience is the key to this race we all run

How to use every resource until nothing is left

How to love and serve others more than myself

How to be thankful for blessings from above

How to never take for granted those that we love

How to string and break green beans

How to put a patch on a hole in my jeans

How to laugh, think, cry, and sing

How not to jump out of a moving swing

How to overcome pain, jealousy, and strife

How irreplaceable my grandmother was in my life

Front porch lessons filled with wisdom and care

Front porch lessons are becoming too rare

What Works For Me

As a classroom teacher who has attended her fair share of workshops, I often leave a full day of professional development wondering if any of the information presented can actually be applied in my classroom. Too many times, I have wasted a day listening to the latest lofty educational theories that are guaranteed to revolutionize the pedagogical world as we know it, only to leave with no true resources. They dazzle me with catchy new acronyms and promises of student success. In reality, all I have gained from my day of professional development is an introduction to another layer of educational rhetoric. As for a workshop that can give me strategies and activities that I can really use in my classroom, I am left to wonder if such a thing really exists.

In an attempt to “refund” a few of the wasted PD hours for teachers everywhere, I humbly offer up some of my favorite lesson ideas. Some of the activities included are my originals, some I borrowed from friends, and some I found online. While these lessons consist of vastly different subject matter, objectives, and methods of implementation, they all share one important trait: they work. I have personally tried, tested, and proven all the lessons included here in my own classroom. My hope in sharing these lessons is that other teachers can use them to experience the same level of joy and student success they afforded me.

Writing

In my first year of teaching, I quickly discovered that being a good writer did not necessarily translate into being a good writing teacher. After attending a multitude of workshops, I gradually began to sift through all the theories and create my own collection

of writing activities. Over the years, this collection has grown, but one factor remains a constant in my collection: all the activities strive to give students the tools they need to become more accomplished writers, while allowing them to remain creative and inspired.

Lesson #1 Ba-da-bing!

Creating a vivid, realistic image for the reader is an advanced skill that my 7th graders often struggle with. One of my favorite solutions for this problem is the “Ba-da-bing!” Gretchen Bernabei presented this activity at the 2008 Gulf Coast Conference on the Teaching of Writing, and the impact on student writing after its implementation in my classroom was tremendous. This is a sentence-imitating activity that helps young writers learn to translate the vibrant images in their mind into words that will recreate that image in the mind of the reader. The lesson begins with the teacher asking the students to focus on one important moment in their memory. While students brainstorm for their moment, the teacher places three icons on the board as follows: a large foot, a large eye, and a thought cloud or bubble. Beside each icon, the teacher writes a word representation for each as follows: where your feet went, what you saw, and what you thought. Next, the teacher will model how to follow these three steps to create writing that will allow students to express their memories in a new and exciting way. Here is an example: When I went (point to the feet) into the kitchen, I saw (point to the eye) my mom at the stove, stirring a pot (point to the thought bubble). Mmmmm, I thought. Chili! Once my students get the basic idea, I extend it by suggesting that they replace simple words with more complex options. For example, replace “went” with “strolled,” “slid,” “bounded,” “raced,” etc. Then replace “saw” with “spied,” “spotted,” “caught a glimpse of,” etc. Students can also replace “thought” with “pondered,” “considered,” etc. The examples

students produce in my classroom for this activity are bursting with vivid, brilliant, imagery. Students are eager to share their creations and very easily make the transition from example, to creation, to inclusion in their essays. For more information on “Ba-da-bing” visit Gretchen Bernabei at www.trailofbreadcrumbs.com. The site includes great variations and spin-offs of the traditional “ba-da-bing”, along with student examples, debriefing questions, and templates for the three icons.

Lesson #2 Jerk Voice

One of the new writing challenges that 7th graders face is how to write persuasively. While the preteens’ budding ability to argue is painfully clear to most adults, this ability does not necessarily transfer to persuasive writing. Students often need help in identifying all the possible arguments and rebuttals for a topic. Expanding on a lesson from Discovery Education, I help students sharpen their argumentation skills with the creation of a “jerk voice.” First, I direct students to picture in their mind the person they argue with the most. Then I take it one step further by introducing them to my “jerk,” a volleyball with a face painted on it. Using a random topic I demonstrate how arguing with your “jerk” can make both sides of the issue become clear. Following the conclusion of the demonstration, I allow students the opportunity to create their own “jerk” in poster form. I then spend the rest of the year trying to convince my students that I don’t have a multiple personality disorder.

Grammar

Lesson #1 Cheesy Grammar Videos

When a teacher mentions the word “grammar,” it is often followed by a student chorus of moans and groans. In an effort to stifle these groans, I suggest letting students create cheesy grammar videos. We all remember and love the classic *School House Rock* collection. Using these videos as a model, students work in cooperative groups of four to create their own grammar rock videos. Groups randomly draw for the part of speech they will represent in their video. After brainstorming for the music and general layout of each video, groups use a film strip graphic organizer to lay out a one-to two-minute video. Students then rehearse and film the video using flip cameras. Finally, the videos are posted on our class web page.

Lesson #2 Parts of Speech Collages

It is always important to include arts and crafts in the middle school and secondary classroom as a way to reach kinesthetic learners. A part of speech collage is the perfect way to combine grammar and art. In cooperative groups of three or four, students randomly draw one of the eight parts of speech. Each group receives a small poster board, glue sticks, scissors, markers, and several magazines. After writing their part of speech in the center of the poster board, students then cut words from the magazines that represent their part of speech to fill the remainder of the poster. Students are encouraged to use words of varied sizes and colors to create a unique and vibrant collage. A great extension to this assignment is to have the groups exchange posters and check to make sure the group only included words that fit their part of speech. Also,

groups can search for words that repeat on more than one poster as an introduction to a lesson on how some words can function as more than one part of speech.

Literature

Lesson #1 *Looney Tunes* Sub-genres of Fiction

One challenging 7th grade ARMT objective is for students to recognize the various genres and sub-genres of literature by their characteristics. Genre is a relatively new term for most 7th graders, so learning about all the different genres and sub-genres can become overwhelming. Perhaps the most difficult category is the many sub-genres of fiction. In order to help students associate and differentiate between all these types, I try to connect them to something familiar. Almost all students are not only familiar with, but love, *Looney Tunes*. Using short clips from *Looney Tunes*, I point out the predominate characteristics in each sub-genre of literature. Students understand that Marvin the Martian is science fiction and therefore can connect the characteristics of the clip to science fiction literature.

Lesson #2 *Hunger Games* Conflict Mutation Creations

In a classroom environment where student engagement is a constant challenge, teachers need to look for new and exciting ways to teach the fundamental concepts of literature. In an effort to do just that, this lesson uses the popular, contemporary young adult novel, *The Hunger Games*, to illustrate the use of conflict in literature. The lesson begins with a quick review of the elements of the plot using a graphic representation of a

plot diagram. Next, students are introduced to the different types of conflict and use guided notes to follow the teacher driven PowerPoint presentation detailing examples of both external and internal conflict as seen in *The Hunger Games*. The presentation is followed by an assignment that allows students to further expand their understanding of external conflict by creating an animal mutation like those used in the novel. Students must not only create an original animal mutation, but explain their concept, special traits, and coping techniques associated with their mutation. The lesson ends with students sharing their creations with the entire class and answering any questions their classmates may have about their creation.

In conclusion, I feel it is important to add that all lessons don't work in all classrooms. A major part of being a successful teacher is searching out and finding what works for you. Never hesitate to adapt a lesson to meet the needs of your specific classroom. The lessons above have all been changed and adapted many times to meet the specific needs of various groups. I hope that the resonating factor in each lesson is a desire to see students enjoy the learning process while meeting and exceeding classroom goals and expectations.

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We Didn't Do No Work

As my 8th graders piled out of my classroom like cattle through a chute, I overheard several of them telling the incoming class, "We didn't do no work!" Stunned by their words, I wanted to chase them down the hall and squeeze them until they regurgitated all the wonderful things I was so sure I had taught them that day. As I dove head first into the next class, my mind continued to return to those awful words. What would Mr. Beard and Mrs. Gibbs think if they heard this horrendous lie? At the end of the day, I tip-toed down the hall and snuck past the office, certain that my pink slip was already in the mail. That night as I tossed and turned in bed the words "We didn't do no work" echoed through my mind. When sleep finally came, it was filled with dreams of the unemployment line.

Six years and a million lessons later, as I listen at that same door, I long to hear those glorious words repeated. I realize now that I am not only an educator but an amazing magician whose job is to trick children into believing that we are not working. All the while, I am covertly imparting knowledge, increasing their critical thinking skills, and training them to survive in our ever changing world. As an educator, aka magician, my magic box of tricks is vast. However, I have learned that these tricks only enchant my audience when I pull them "outside the box."

There are so many ways to teach outside the box in any discipline, and the beauty of this is that students think learning is all just fun and games. Teaching the eight parts of speech by making cheesy grammar rock parodies and giant verb collages—that's not work, that's fun. Learning about persuasive writing and argumentation by sparring with our class volleyball "Wilson"—that's not work, that's fun. Teaching pie and palindromes

together with the math teacher while eating pie— that’s not work, that’s fun. I could go on and on about all the ways I trick my students into learning, but one simple fact says it all: When students think they are not working, they do their best work. When I am truly teaching outside the box, my students are engaged, creating, discussing, and thinking, and that’s not work, that’s fun. So now when I hear the lovely words “We didn’t do no work,” I smile in spite of their marvelous grammar because I have tricked them once again. Then I make a mental note to pull something out of my box to cover double negatives.

Classic Literature Overload

Hawthorne, Twain, Faulkner, Poe,
Classic authors we all should know.

Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn,
We love it when the bad boy wins.

Dewey Dell, Annabelle Lee,
Stream of consciousness confusing me.

Joseph Conrad, Melville too,
Much to read, what shall I do?

Heart of Darkness, Moby Dick,
War and Peace is mighty thick.

Zora Hurston, Langston Hughes,
Forcing me to sing the blues.

Harper Lee, *Mockingbirds*,
Annotating word by word.

Atticus, Boo, Jem, Scout,
Careful, don't leave someone out.

Austen, Brontë', London, Kipling,

Advanced vocab my mind is crippling.

Alcott, Dickens, days of yore,

Please sir, May I have some more?

Daisy, Gatsby, Zelda, Nick,

Easy now, I'm feeling sick.

Ethan Frome, Little Women,

Grapes of Wrath, my head is spinnin'.

Othello, Hamlet, Juliet,

I might make it through this yet.

Wordsworth, Emerson, Will Shakespeare,

None of this is very clear.

Frankenstein, Dracula, Hester Prynne,

When will all this madness end?

All Is Quiet on the Western Front,

I think I should drop back and punt.

Hemingway, Steinbeck, Salinger, Thoreau,

Stop, I'm begging, let me go!

Pride and Prejudice, Jekyll and Hyde,

That's all I've got, my brain is fried!

GLORIA HORTON



“Two roads diverged in a yellow
wood, and I...I took the one less
traveled by, and that has made all
the difference.”

Robert Frost

Reading

Every night

Until I fall asleep

Every evening

During dinner

Escape the routine of day-to-day life

Worlds of intrigue

Excitement

Romance

Nosy reporter

Cute cupcake baker

Vibrant, young, adventurous, popular

Not Gloria Horton, grammar guru and old woman

My companion since I was a toddler

Visits to the bookmobile

Every week

Hopping a bus to the public library

Letting go of my stresses

Relaxing through the excitement of other lives

Moonflight in Autumn

Low in the evening sky
Rests a burnt orange orb,
Its gargantuan face,
With pensive frown,
Gazing down on the land below.

The sheen of Jack Frost
Barely tinges the landscape,
A sign to the moon
That autumn is here
With its biting breath.

Perhaps the rime
Makes the moon forlorn
Because, ere long,
The reluctant sphere
Rises up among the stars.

Its orange fire fades
To an icy white
As if the moon itself
Cannot escape the chill
Of a late October night.

Where I'm From

- I am from 78 speed records, from Peter Pan Peanut Butter, and cokes with peanuts n the bottom of the bottle.
- I am from a red brick Cape Cod style house—boxy, white-walled, filled with “stuff.”
- I am from four o’clocks, nasturtiums, and hollyhocks growing in my grandfather’s garden
From fig trees and roses, and sweet-shrub by the back door.
- I am from Sunday afternoon drives across the city in the family Chrysler, from Richard
And Evelyn, Mommie and Scampy, Aunt Rosalyn and Mary Rosalyn.
- I am from the mixture of Southern gentility and English strictness, from open affection
and close family ties,
From “the boogeyman will get you if you don’t watch out” and “if you stick that lip out
any further, you can walk to China on it.”
- I am from strong Methodist roots, but our family has its share of backsliders, me
included.
- I am from the beautiful countryside of Cornwall and the rolling hills of Scotland, from
Birmingham, Alabama, from World War II and Bull Connor’s dogs in the streets
of downtown Birmingham, from heavy cake and tasty meat pies, lane cake, and
ice cream floats on the front porch glider.
- From the shoe my daddy threw at Nat King Cole when he first appeared on the *Ed
Sullivan Show*, from Scampy always burning holes in his pants when he put his
lighted pipe in them, from Mommie’s getting her belt out in the afternoons when
I couldn’t take a nap.
- I am from albums filled with family photos stored in boxes in a storage building, from
my own stashes of family keepsakes in closets, in bookcase cubbies, in dresser
drawers, and on every available surface of the tables throughout my house.
- These keepsakes of my life, my children’s lives, my grandchildren’s lives, and the lives
of all who came before them mark who I am today, who I was before, and
who I will be tomorrow.

So Much to Learn, So Little Time

Flipping classrooms, power codes,
Wordles, wikis, resource downloads,
Project-based, challenged- based,
Research-based learning galore--
Every time I turn my head,
The edu-scape changes, more and more.

Two hundred e-mails, NWP blogs,
Facebook messages, Twitter logs,
Animoto, Prezi, Grammar Girl, too,
Moviemaker, Audacity--a virtual zoo!

Being a teacher is very fine—
I mustn't sleep—I'll get behind!

Wolfram Alpha, Image Chef,
Dropbox, vidrhythm, scared to death!
YouTube, i-Pad, which to use?
Better use both—I snooze, I lose.
Blackboard modules, Safe Assign,
Sometimes I think I've lost my mind.

So much to learn in the digital age,
Need to engage students with the latest rage.

Poll Everywhere, URL links,

Thinking about them, my heart sinks.

Technology zapping me from every side,

This has to stop—my brain is fried.

Kellilyn Johnson Schrezt



**"It is difficult to inspire others to accomplish
what you haven't been willing to try."**

Unknown

Where I'm From

I am from flip-flops, Pine Sol, and home-grown vegetables.
I am from the homes on the six-acre hill, peaceful, inviting to all.
I am from the long wrap-around porch that made a perfect racetrack for big wheels.
I hear laughter and singing all around.
I am from the gardenia bushes lining the house,
plum trees, Coke floats, and washrags.

I'm from Wiffle ball in the front yard, tall Mexican cornbread, homemade ice cream
and a swimming pool,
From Mike and Vivian, my brother Jason, Maw Maw, Grandmother, and Paw Paw.
I'm from the loud-laugh, flat-fannies, and flat-feet.
I'm from Momma's back rubs and Daddy's hugs.
From "Be careful" and "Call on your way home."
I'm from "Just a Little Talk with Jesus" and "Froggie Went a Courtin'" as we swung
on the front porch or in Maw Maw's yard.

I'm from Angel Station, homemade buttermilk biscuits, and yucky pear salad.
From the athletic days of Daddy and Jason, the games of Horse in the front yard, and
the feasts from Momma more often than not.
I am from family albums of the long line of Angels and Johnsons that I've never met
but heard stories about.
I am from photos tucked away somewhere in the coffee table, in picture frames
propped against the wall, and the videos of family events, great and small.
I am from those moments that I want to never forget, that I want to pass down.

I realize I have big shoes to fill.

Summer Reading Challenges: Are They Worth It?

Each fall, English teachers become frustrated with the lack of participation in summer reading as they realize that not students read their book requirements over the summer break. Parents question the purpose of summer reading and voice their opinions to the teacher and administrators. With the bombardment of social media, Web-based video games, and summer vacations, students read the information provided by Sparknotes rather than cracking open the classic novel(s) selected for the upcoming year. On the other hand, selecting pieces of literature for each grade level to read is a daunting task. Teachers feel the strain from their colleagues of selecting contemporary literature instead of classic literature; however, they hear the students' moans when the classic literature is selected over the contemporary pieces.

This problem is not a new one. As stated in Lu's article "Engaging Students with Summer Reading," she addresses that "summer reading in the United States has received increasing attention in the past 30 years" (90). According to Fiore and Roman, a reputable study was done in 1982 to measure the effects of summer reading. It discovered that "by the end of fifth grade, students who didn't read during the summer lagged two years behind their book-reading peers" (27). Also, Gorman adds to this study a discussion on the disagreements that exist regarding the purpose of summer reading (52). Currently, most American high school English courses require "static, grade-specific lists of book titles and a required written assessment" (Lu and Gordon). The origins of summer reading are not clearly stated, but the summer reading lists "actually seem to have originated in the public library sphere" (Gorman 52).

The solution is not as easy for parents and students as it is for educators and administrators. Teachers of English do not have to be coerced to read. The challenge is convincing parents and students that reading during the summer months is worthwhile and meaningful. Persuading parents to understand that reading between two to four books in the summer months can increase their child's level of academic success poses additional challenges. Some parents see the summer months as an official break and do not make their child read. This attitude passes from parent to child, and teachers not only feel the negative effects in the classroom but also see the academic gaps widening each year. Based on a study conducted by Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson, Kim and White note "...more than half of the gap in 9th-grade reading comprehension scores between low-income students and their middle-income counter-parts was explained by differences in summer learning that accumulated from 1st to 5th grade" (64). This startling finding reveals the initial problem: how can teachers motivate students to engage in summer reading?

The answer to the summer reading debate is complicated. It requires teachers to involve students in the selection of literature, and it also requires parents to support and encourage their students to read during the summer months. Teaching the value of reading has to be a task shared at home and school for there to be significant academic gains; however, if the parents do not promote reading, then it will not be a priority, and ultimately, the students and English classrooms will continue to suffer.

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Blessed, Once More

Life-defining moments cause us to appreciate the precious people in our life and hang on to every second that's left. October 31, 2011 was one of those moments, not because it was Halloween, but because it involved our youngest daughter, Madison, and it shook us to our core.

For some, the spooky date signifies Halloween, the time when children across America long for that perfect costume that might win a prize or a few more pieces of candy. For my family, last year's date marked an event we never imagined we would experience.

Stores had been displaying costumes well over a month before I took the time to ask Lauren and Madison which fairytale princess they wanted to dress like this year. Madi shouted "Cinderella," while Lauren decided to create her own costume, a "black-eyed 'P.'" The idea of making a costume days before Halloween caused stress to invade my thought patterns and seize any excitement I could possibly add to Lauren's creation. She cut out a "P" and glued it to a brown shirt, while I colored a black circle the size of a softball over her eye. Madison dug in the back of the closet for the coveted dress-up costume Lauren had received for her fifth birthday and begged to wear it. I conceded and slipped it over her squirmy body.

"Yay! It fits, Momma," Madi exclaimed as she twirled in the mirror.

"Great!" I said, as I dug through the mound of shoes looking for the matching Cinderella slippers. I peeled the dress off Madison and hung it beside Lauren's creative concoction of a costume. Later, we scrubbed the black circle from Lauren's eye, and Madison kept reminding us that she was going to be "Cinderella." Laughter

filled the girls' room as they predicted what other costumes would look like. After baths and prayers, the girls jumped in their beds and pulled the covers around their face. Giggles continued to dance down the hall to our bedroom, forcing me to bark a warning. Three warnings warrant a spanking, but tonight, I dreaded the thought of having to stifle their happiness. They surprised me, though, because ten minutes later, all you could hear was Chris Tomlin's song "Our God" coming from their room, letting me know they were asleep.

Halloween happened to be on Sunday, so our church provided a Fall Festival with lots of food, games, and entertainment for the children. Madison and Lauren pleaded to wear their costumes to church that morning, but Tim and I quickly declined. After church, our family gathered at Baja Grill to eat before the busy week began. Our schedules are always filled with ballgames, homework, practices, and more ballgames, so Sunday lunch served as the only time we could fellowship as a family. Conversations and laughter filled the air as we discussed our jobs, school, and family drama. I soon realized after the first bowl of chips and salsa that Sundays don't happen enough.

As we left the restaurant, the conversations followed us to our cars. Mom and I wiped our tear-stained eyes and we hugged goodbye, while the others walked away still laughing and discussing the upcoming week. Suddenly, from the corner of my eye, I witnessed a horrific scene. It all happened so fast. I could hear my husband screaming. The moment I saw him dash across the parking lot, my stomach fell to my toes, and I couldn't run fast enough. In an attempt to beat Lauren to the minivan in their silly game of "I Beat You," Madi slammed into the side of a moving VW bug.

She was so tiny; she ran between two parked cars without looking both ways. She just wanted to win the game. All I could do was scream and cry. Tim snatched her up and rushed her to the van. With all of the wailing in the car, I'm not sure how Tim managed to drive us to the emergency room.

I scribbled Madison's name down, and nervously made my way to the cold, hard chair. Flashbacks flooded my mind of previous waiting rooms that were life-defining: my Daddy's surgery to remove his voice box and other areas in his neck drenched in cancer cells; my friend Carrie's surgery to remove cancer from her colon; and my precious Madison's three surgeries on her eyes and mouth. I prayed to the Lord, begging once again for His intervention and power. No one else could rescue us from this living nightmare. My family provided comfort and additional prayers as we waited for our turn to see the doctor.

When they called Madison's name, we jumped up and practically ran through the doors. Madison started screaming "Nooooo!!!" before we could get to the triage room, only because she feared getting a shot. Madison switched from my lap to Mom's lap repeatedly, trying to get comfortable. There seemed to be no outer damage done to her body, but the right side of her entire face was tinted pink. My mind drifted to thoughts of internal injuries, and the idea was much too difficult to think about now. Waiting was our only option. The doctor ordered X-rays to be done, so I briskly followed the nurse down the maze of a hallway to the examination room.

As we waited impatiently on the results, my heart was heavy. What was the outlook for our little Madi? Is it a concussion? A brain bleed? Why is it taking so long? Prayers mixed with guilt, and then guilt mixed with worry. While my thoughts

were racing away, Madison just sat in Nana's arms, enjoying Nana's undivided attention. Tim called his parents and brother so they could begin to pray. The minutes seemed to tick by slower than normal.

The doctor entered and announced that nothing showed up on the X-ray and we were free to go. Relief came over me and tears filled my eyes. I praised the Lord and thanked Him for protecting Madison from severe injury. As we left the emergency room, we realized that the day could've had a different outcome.

That night, the prettiest "Cinderella" and the cutest "Black-eyed 'P'" were thrilled they were going to play games and eat too much candy at the church's fall festival. Madison clutched my leg as we piled out of the van. It took only a few seconds to realize why she was scared to walk, and I bent down and reassured her that I would never let go of her hand.

Looking back, I know *this* day was life-defining because it reminded me of the value of each day we are given to live. My heart experienced a roller coaster of emotions because of my irresponsibility. Once more, the Lord provided; once more, the Lord healed Madison. Our prayers were answered, and we were blessed, once more.

Doran Smith

"Even if it's a dumb story, telling it changes people just the slightest little bit, just as

living the story changes me."

-John Green



Where I'm from

I am from Rook,
from Coca-Cola and carbonation's bite.
I am from the leaves, blowing magically
in any one of my backyard's falls,
rustling in autumn's mystery.
I am from the dogwood tree,
blossoming in the spring by the house
I no longer have.

I am from the slaps on the back
of my head to correct my grammar,
from the disappointments of my father
and the expectations of my mother,
to the love of my sisters and the finding of friends

I am from the rhythm of drums beating in my head:
crescendos and accents and personal codas.

I am from Victory in Jesus
with His redeeming Blood.

I am from the mountain's top to valley's low,
from William Tell to Allen Poe,
and from Billy Shakes to Doctor Who.

Sometimes, I am from Hogwarts even more than from Alabama.

I am from fudge rounds,
to which I will most decidedly return.

I am from dueling fates and American faces:

From amethyst rings and Tatooine,

Just as much as I am from outer space and the Justice League

I am from Cullman, AL and the rest of the world.

I am from the house on the hill in Jacksonville.

I am from Doran Daddy to Smity,

From Jerry to Dad,

I am from all my names

as they show value greater than my own;

Living before me and after

in houses down the street.

From Teacher to Detective

She had been through this kind of thing before; the students always blew off her assignments as boring or tedious. Lectures and worksheets and quizzes and tests, the students always did the same thing day in and day out. While reading her book to her not-so-attentive class, she felt so trapped by her own words and by her own lessons.

“And never had Hester Prynne appeared more ladylike, in the antique interpretation of the term, than as she issued from the prison,” she read and placed the freshly opened book back on the student’s desk. “So now we know that Hester has been released from the prison and is wearing an embroidered, scarlet A on her clothes. Why is that?” she asked. After a few moments of quiet moans, a few reluctant hands push through the air. “Because she committed adultery,” Jada answered.

“Very good, and how do we know this,” choosing a student to answer, “Markus?”

“What! Oh. Uh, because she has the baby, and everyone is, like, talking about how the husband hasn’t, like, been around for years,” he answered.

It went like this for several minutes and during several classes until, at the end of the day, the teacher was almost ready to leave. As she was packing, she looked around her bare room, feeling trapped by its walls and confined by its shape. This feeling followed her home. And even in her living room, watching her mystery show unravel, she felt like she couldn’t breathe. The detective could not identify the strangler, even with all of the evidence, all of the people helping him, and all of his training. He was stuck. How could he possibly win?

While trying to get comfortable, she decided to open all of her windows, to get a breath of fresh air. As she finally breathed and returned to her mystery, she noticed the

detective writing everything he saw in a journal. Through watching the suspects, considering them, and writing down their actions, he was able to identify the killer, to solve the mystery. Perhaps this was the fresh air she sought.

When she walked into the classroom the next day, she immediately opened each window at the back of her classroom; at last, she could breathe. And when the students came in that day, they breathed more easily as well.

“Students, we know that the father of Hester’s child is not her husband; that is why she was imprisoned,” she said. “How many of you think you know who the father is?” The students looked at each other to see who had the insight. No hands rose.

Well throughout the rest of the story, you will play the role of a detective attempting to figure out the father’s true identity. You will be journaling the actions and scenes between all of the suspected characters, and we will determine the other parent together.”

The students began to think and began to grow. It’s not that they *were* detected, but that they detected! It’s not that they *were* taught, but that they learned. They expended their horizons and did things they had never done before. They worked outside of their comfort zones and became comfortable with different things. In weight-lifting, you only get stronger when you push past your limits. These students were learning the same way; they only grew when they accomplished something new to them.

Party of One

As he walked by, he patted me on the shoulder. Sitting in my foldable chair, I was on the back aisle and right on his path to the makeshift altar. As he turned to go down to the center, he didn't turn and look at me as I thought he would; he just kept on trucking. He was followed by his father and then the minister. When he got to the front, he turned and looked through the crowd. He seemed happy, and with good reason, too. He was getting hitched.

Ever since high school, when we were good friends, he had hit it lucky with his girl. They stayed together through all of the high school drama and then through college, and now they are getting married. So here I sit, party of one, at their wedding with his wedding party wandering down the aisle, the wedding party that I'm not in. That's understandable, though. We lost touch a little after high school, and I only came to see him once or twice, but he never came to see me.

So now everyone is crying as she walks toward him; well, I'm not. And everyone is quiet right before the minister speaks, but I cough. And after a while, all of the overdressed and sweating people are either laughing or crying, and I'm still just sitting here, alone, watching these two kids I used to know. This. Sucks.

Next thing I know, everyone is standing up and clapping, and the rest of my high school friends have shot streamers in the air. I clap and give them a smile as the bride and groom walk by, but neither of them look at me. They are too busy laughing and running away and falling into each other's eyes. They both seem genuinely happy--good for them.

They've gone into another building to change and get fancied up again for their reception. A reception. That always struck me as a stupid idea: meeting and greeting people that just got married. We know they just got married; we just watched them five minutes ago. While I waited, I saw a few other friends from high school: the theatre friend who also wasn't in the wedding party, the band guys, the slacker, and the smart kids. I guess I was the jock.

It's almost like they took turns seeing me so that I got to tell my story over and over again. One at a time, people saw me, came over, started talking about their relationships or their awesome jobs, and then asked me what I'm doing. I got to stand there and tell them I broke up with that girl again, lost my scholarship, transferred schools, and was looking for a job. They all said that I'm living the life but then gave me those eyes that say "I feel so sorry for you." That's crap.

After the twentieth or so person gave me the eyes, the keep-your-chin-up good bye, and left, I decided I can't do this again. Right as I'm got ready to split, one of the people working for this place ran up and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the happy couple will soon be arriving." *So*, I thought, *Should I stay, or should I go?*

I let my feet answer for me. As everyone got ready around the door, I headed in the other direction to my truck. To get through the parking lot, I went right by the little house where the couple was getting ready. There was a sidewalk leading from that building to the door where all of the people waited to greet them. My door slammed, and my engine roared to life. I stood on the gas and sent rocks flying from underneath. And as I spun around the path from the gravel to the road, I turned back and saw the couple

standing on that sidewalk, looking toward the giant sound coming from my truck. I

thought, *I guess they're looking at me now, aren't they?*

Finding Students' Voices

On a colorful autumn day, I find myself in my classroom ready to dive into another wonderful lesson with my students. I have worked and planned for this lesson to the best of my ability, incorporating different methods of instruction to help my middle school students succeed. As I come to the middle of the lesson where my students write, I receive only moans and groans because of the aches and pains students seem to associate with writing even one word. All of the great methods of instruction seem to crumble like the Tower of Babel when we ask students to write.

We English teachers have all been in this position: building up lessons on research-based methods only to have our best-laid plans spoiled in the heat of the moment. We ask *why is this?* The trickiest part of being a middle school teacher—on top of dealing with changing hormones and the sudden interest in the opposite gender—is keeping writing and reading fun for students. In the midst of middle school, students lose their adoration for telling stories. They believe it's no longer cool to speak out and be heard; they have lost their voices. Above and beyond that, students view English teachers as the villains because we force them to write. Middle school English teachers shouldn't be viewed as the villains but as the heroes who fly to the rescue. We should be there, armed and ready, to help students find their voices again.

One reason why English teachers are villainized is that we begin to emphasize grammar and punctuation in a piece of writing rather than its content. Their teachers criticize their work, and what they have said is suddenly less important. An easy fix to this problem is not teaching grammar in isolation, but always combining grammar and

content-related instruction to remind students that they have something important to share.

Another tool in the teacher's utility belt *what* we have students writing. It has been shown in research that students enjoy writing about similar subjects, no matter if the students are from urban, suburban, or rural schools (Shippen, Houchins, Puckett, & Ramsey, 2007). Also, students enjoy reading or writing about subjects in which they show situation interest. Situational interest is defined by Schraw and Lehman (2001) as "short-lived, context-dependent, and based on spontaneous engagement." Therefore, English teachers can spur interest and engagement in writing by giving more student-friendly subjects. The most popular themes among middle and high school students are "having or not having money," "life at school," and "conflicts between best friends."

Not only do students enjoy writing about their favorite topics, but students can also find more remarkable subjects to write about than teachers usually give them credit for. While interviewing five authors on their methods of writing fictional narratives, Doyle (1998) concluded that "each writer spoke of the incidents [the first seeds of inspiration for their writing] as being touching, intriguing, puzzling, mysterious, haunting or overwhelming." If we can lead students to their own seeds of inspiration, students will become more interested in writing with attention to detail, theme and other important literary standards.

Students spend as many of their waking hours as possible trying to socialize and make themselves stand out from the crowd. Yet, students claim to have nothing to say whenever English teachers ask them to write. Middle school English teachers have a greater power than we realize, and we must make sure to use it for the power of good.

We can use are tools to come to the rescue of middle school students who think they have nothing to say.

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Nicolle Smith



"Imagination is more important than knowledge.
Knowledge is limited.
Imagination encircles the world."

Albert Einstein

Where I'm From

I am from the embroidered washcloths, from NESQUICK, and mud races.

I am from the exhausted strawberry fields, the winding dirt roads, and Fescue.

I am from the honeysuckle bush with the buzzing, whizzing bees,
the warm, invigorating September breeze.

I am from bean snapping, and help others, but help yourself,
from Margie and Dewayne and Calloway.

I am from cucumber cows and going around and around.

From don't hold your breath and the last piss in the dish and running naked as a picked
bird.

I am from turkey hands traced in hymn books. Saying prayers and including the swears,
and I won't go without the other. Family comes first.

I'm from Cullman and the banks of Vest Creek,

Kraut and weenies and ketchup.

From the little boiled peanut, the county fair showrooms, the silly nicknames my father
made up.

From the cancer that ate my Granny up.

The puppies I found, and the scar on my chin.

I am from the front porch of my parents and the critters that raised me. I am from the
spoken stories of my grandmother. The journal she's keeping to give to me. The spirit of
laughter and always exaggerated truth.

Farewell

I humbly extend to you,
This poem of adieu.
The time we spent together...
I will truly cherish you all forever.
I feel as though I learned so much,
Please try to keep in touch.

Ta-Ta to Mary and your journalistic views.
Delilah, your anthology section, I'm dying to peruse.
Good-bye to Charlsie and your contagious laughter.
The positive attitude of Kellilyn, I'll seek after.

Kenny, The Box was the most engaging, the truest.
Adios to Rodney and his cat named Louis.
She changed my life, Melissa did.
Gloria, I loved your stories about you as a kid.

Ciao to Rachel and her techi-ness.
Ashley, your quiet thoughts I will miss.
And finally, Doran, my thoughts do roam,
What can I say? I'll just see you at home.

I love you all, and I've had such fun!
JSU Writing Project, my heart you've won!

My Summer

JSU Writing Project

Valuable, Helpful

Inspiring, Enriching, Nourishing

I couldn't do without.

Growing, Learning, Writing

Determined, Surprising

Me

The Box

Not inside but out
Or
Not outside but in
Thinking... Trying...
To connect to each mind
On the inside AND out.

Which is better?
In or out?

Inside the box, it's quiet and calm
Natural, set in stone.
In is expected.

Outside the box, it's loud and wild
Different, pliable
Out is unknown.

Which is better?
In or out for the mind of a child?
Who is to say which is better?
They do.

Are you in or out?
How do you think?
How do children think?
Are they in or out?

Cookie Cutter or Cookie Blunder?
In is to fit the norm conventionally.
To read, write, and think according to academic
expectations and social norms.
Is it striving for acceptance or contriving for the score?
Are you in or out?

Break the Mold or Break the Goal?
Out is to push the limit, be original.
To read, write, and think without regard to boundaries
and examination.
Is it living full of color or just breaking all the rules?

Are you in or out?

Are they in or out?

I am in, but I'm out...
I like my guidelines but crave
freedom.
I practice traditional form but
experiment occasionally.
I want acceptance and praise, the
perfect piece, but
I long to be different not like
you.

Aren't children the same?
Are they in or out?

A good teacher, good leader
Inquires, pursues, seeks
To reach each child inside and out
To teach a child, take your
knowledge, determination, and
devotion.
Not just in subject but also in
soul...
What does he like? What can she
do? How can I help?
 Know the child
 Show the child
 Grow the child
On the inside and out!

As a teacher, use the inside and out.
When reading, writing, and thinking
Think outside for topics, projects, and
styles.
Soar with those minds that are creative,
diverse, and confident

As a teacher, use the inside and out.
When reading, writing, and thinking
Think inside for procedures, instructions,
and conditions.
Ground those minds that are analytical,
methodical, and consistent.

As a teacher, use both, think both, teach
both from the inside and out.

Our Multicultural Classroom

What types of challenges is a teacher faced with whenever a new, culturally diverse student enters the classroom? How can the classroom teacher help his or her new student? According to Nanette Avery, the author of "Our Multicultural Classroom," it is important to welcome a new student without unintentionally putting too much emphasis on his or her differences. Instead, the teacher should take a sincere and respectful interest in the child to create a comfortable learning environment. He or she should also model supportive attitudes for the other students to imitate. E.K. Garcia simply defines multiculturalism in the classroom as "an educational movement built on basic American values such as freedom, justice, opportunity, and equality." According to Garcia's article titled "Multicultural Education in Your Classroom," every teacher should pursue the following goals for his or her multicultural classroom: build positive, diverse self-images; promote cultural awareness on the national and international level; and prevent any negative prejudiced actions or discriminatory remarks.

In regard to strategies and techniques that can aid a new student academically, Avery has several suggestions that are especially helpful for students who are English Language Learners. A picture dictionary is one of the first resources that should be readily available for the student (Avery). Pairing the new child with a buddy is a great way in which the student can make a friend and also have someone there to provide support when needed. In addition, children's literature can be a fun and highly motivating way to introduce difficult English concepts such as homonyms and parts of speech (Avery). Garcia points out that literature can demonstrate universal truths and open

opportunities for students to research and create projects that foster cultural awareness. Poetry is also presented as a great way for an English Language Learner to apply personal meaning to words and to showcase the elements of the English language that he or she has learned (Avery). Moreover, Avery states that a new student with a culturally diverse background can “enrich classroom learning” in significant ways. To extract as many potential educational opportunities as possible, Avery suggests routine class projects that allow each child to research and share his or her cultural heritage with the class.

In conclusion, a teacher can incorporate multiculturalism into his or her classroom in many ways. I found these articles to be very helpful in providing me with numerous ideas that I can use to create an accepting and open-minded learning environment. Moreover, I like the way that Avery’s article includes strategies to make a new, culturally-diverse student feel welcome and suggests several ways to enhance a new student’s experience academically as well.

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Not Ready

A place to hide! I am desperate to get away. Like a sleek rabbit darting, scurrying to find a burrow, a log, a low brush—anything to escape. I'm not ready. I slow now, tentative, cautious, not wanting to enter a new danger—an entrapment. I skid to a stop at the last corner, consciously aware to slow my heaving chest. My ears are alert and prickling. I press my frame flat against the cool, freshly painted cinder blocks in the long hallway. My new classroom is just two doors down. Methodically, I gauge the distance and the open doorways looming between this twitchy rabbit and the shiny red name plate with my name blocked in white. Creep or dash? Who may see me? What if I'm swept into another horrifying conversation? I'm not ready. Roguish laughter on the stairwell behind me sends me barreling headlong down the hall. I slip stealthily into my classroom, easing the door closed and extinguishing the sterility of the fluorescent lights.

I quickly survey the room searching for the comfort spot. My desk! Oh, my wooden fortress of safety! I dive, flinging my trembling body beneath it. Huddling, I let out the low, wounded sob I had been stifling since the first morning meeting. CIP, PST, RTI, I-NOW, and other foreign acronyms swirl in my mind, causing an acute dizziness. Numbers, figures, and overwhelming statistics bob up and down, up and down in the ocean of my mind. Somewhere my brain tries to throw out a life preserver: "Use the data as guidelines to better serve your students. Find the weaknesses, and implement strategies to close the gaps." I lean my sea-sick head against the stiff boards. I'm not ready.

After a few moments, I will my mind to swim towards the shore. Stop worrying. School has not even started yet, but it will—tomorrow. I'm not ready. Fourth grade orientation is in two hours. I force myself to peek out from under my desk and take stock

of my priorities. There are posters that still scatter the tile floor; mountains of planners, handbooks, documents, and letters that are heaped in disarray along the countertops; and other random adhesive and paper supplies that litter my classroom. I'm not ready. I slink out from my haven—defeated already.

The thought of defeat before the game had actually begun suddenly ignites a hot spark deep in my gut. As if in a trance, I shuffle slowly to the first student desk. Tracing the immaculate black sharpie cursive of "Jimmy Ryan," I slip back to the moment I had painstakingly yet lovingly penned his name on the decorative nameplate in eager anticipation for my first teaching year. Had the mid-morning grade level meeting already squashed that excitement?

"Well, well... good luck with Jimmy," one bitter old bitty had barked. "He's a kid designed to break first years like you." Her sly crooked smile slipped from behind the grim countenance she gave little effort to conceal. Snatching the class roster listing the precious minds I held dearly to my chest, another vulture began circling my future. She then swooped down and began devouring my hopes, my goals, and even my children. "I don't think you'll do as much as you want to with this class. Let's see, six behavior problems, five in RTI, and three kids that are—*M.R.*" Scoffing, she began to admire her own list. Her biting words and brutal eyes had resounded with *You're not ready.*

Drawing myself back from that horrendous encounter, I feel the ember of anger and indignity crackling in my throat. My eyes wander around the classroom, my classroom. This is my dream. I gaze at each straight and neat little desk. Tomorrow, a body will be behind each of those tables, and I will be the teacher. The flame of

determination warms my spirit. I set about cleaning, organizing, and preparing for the orientation.

Later that evening, as the parents and students trickled into our pristine classroom, I keep an eye out for Jimmy Ryan—the one designated to break me. He arrives of course. I shake his father's strong, calloused working hands and look down into Jimmy's eyes with an inviting smile. Jimmy squares his shoulders and stares up at me inquisitively; then, a long mischievous grin spreads across his tan, freckled face. The teaching spark engulfs my entire frame and mind. I am not beaten. I am ready.

Azano, Amy, and Elizabeth D. Tuckwiller. "GPS for the English Classroom: Understanding Executive Dysfunction in Secondary Students with Autism." *Teaching Exceptional Children* 43.6 (2011): 38-43. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 12 June 2012.

In this article, Amy Azano and Elizabeth D. Tuckwiller discuss Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and provide English teachers with effective methods for accommodating these students in their classrooms. ASD is a developmental disorder, and it commonly affects a person's language, behavior, and social interactions. A student with ASD may struggle with memory, attention, behavior, processing information, transitions, and more. Teachers in the general education classroom will have students with ASD in their classroom, and they are responsible for making accommodations to improve these students' executive function. In the English classroom, these students often struggle the most because English is centered on language, one of the core deficits of ASD. To accommodate students with ASD, English teachers should begin by creating a routine in the classroom. A daily schedule is particularly helpful, and providing detailed information allows these students to orient themselves. Providing transitions between activities also lessens students' difficulty. For example, teachers can ring a bell, clap their hands, or turn the lights off to warn students of an upcoming transition. Using graphic organizers is also suggested, so students can organize information and plan activities in advance. English teachers should model assignments, and they should not discount differentiating assessments. If a student with ASD takes away the main idea of a lesson, learning has occurred, even if it is different from the others students' paths to the same idea.

Ashley Bryant

Ostenson, Jonathan and Elizabeth Gleason-Sutton. "Making the Classics Matter to Students through Digital Literacies and Essential Questions." *English Journal* 101.2 (Nov. 2011): 37-43. Web. 19 Jun. 2012.

The basic premise of this article is to use "essential questions and digital literacies" to help students access classic novels. Essential questions refer to open ended questions that a teacher uses as an anchor question for the whole novel as a unit. In this article, the authors use *The Scarlet Letter* as an example. Students use the question "What is worth risking everything for?" This question anchors all discussions for the unit, which culminates in a photo essay. This is the digital literacy part of the lesson. Students create slide shows representing the emotional implications of symbols in the novel including music to back up the emotional impact of the piece. According to Ostenson and Gleason-Sutton, the benefits of this new program are far-reaching. Students connect to the novel more readily because they are accessing technology that is rarely inside the classroom; likewise, students are engaged in all parts of the writing process in this project even though they are not writing a traditional essay. The authors especially praise the benefit of this project for an understanding of revision. Overall, Ostenson and Gleason-Sutton conclude that this format helps students with the daunting task of understanding classic literature.

Kenny Clevenger

Rymes, Betsy. *Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection*.

Creskill: Hampton Press, 2009. Print.

Betsy Rymes' book clearly outlines how to actively analyze classroom discourse in a way that any teacher who wishes to do so is able simply by reading her text. The book moves in a transition from what classroom discourse is to how to properly analyze discourse in order to improve one's own teaching. Rymes focuses primarily on the three major dimensions of classroom discourse analysis: social context, interactional context, and individual agency. She then moves to recording and viewing teachers' discourse with students, transcribing the discourse properly, and spends the last half of the book on analysis. Put all together, Rymes calls her approach multidimensional classroom discourse analysis. Each chapter ends with practical questions, reflections, and activities that review the contents of the chapter. Rymes' intention with her book is to help teachers analyze what takes place in their own classrooms as a researcher/observer by recording it and viewing it outside of class; then, after analyzing the discourse, the teacher is able to come up with a plan to improve upon his/her teaching when dealing with future situations of a similar nature.

Rachael Couch

Maxwell, Rhonda J., Mary J. Meiser, and Katherine McKnight. *Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools*. Columbus, OH: Pearson, 2011. 321-349. Print.

Student teaching is a wonderful time to take hold of the responsibility of teaching a class without the pressure of being alone. This is what the closing chapter of the textbook entitled *Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools* reminds us. The book is written with the pre-service or new teacher in mind. Each chapter discusses what can be expected in a typical sixth through twelfth grade English classroom. This book addresses questions and approaches by both the veteran teacher and the new teacher by inviting the reader into the journal writings of both. The last chapter proves to be as helpful to the reader as the first chapter. It seeks to answer questions such as what might a student teacher need to be aware of before he or she enters the classroom? What could a new teacher expect to find in her first time teaching position? These inquiries are addressed with frankness and wisdom as a veteran teacher shares her thoughts, advice, and support. Best of all, each chapter in this book concludes with a helpful website list for that particular chapter topic.

Mary J. Cox

Gallagher, Kelly. *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers, 2009. Print.

Readicide by Kelly Gallagher is a refreshing common sense approach to teaching reading. In a world of educational crisis and pre-packaged reading plans that promise a quick fix, Gallagher reminds us that the only way to become a better reader is to read. He skillfully details how teachers must find a delicate balance between over-teaching a novel and throwing students into a text that is too difficult without any assistance. Gallagher makes startling fact based revelations about the flawed creation of No Child Left Behind, and how this and other similar government legislation have lead educators to adopt chop- it- up reading plans in a desperate attempt to meet unattainable standards. Consequently, we have systematically removed all the joy from reading, creating an epidemic in our schools that Gallagher refers to as “readicide.”

What makes *Readicide* an indispensable teacher resource is that it not only addresses the tough reading issues teachers face in their classrooms, but offers real world strategies and resources to tackle these problems. *Readicide* holds a wealth of information on how teachers can create and revive a love of reading in their students, while still preparing them to be successful in today’s world. Gallagher uses examples from his classroom to illustrate the need to instill a life-long love of reading in our students, and how this love of reading will translate into better performance in all academic subjects.

Delilah Darden

Knowles, Trudy and Dave F. Brown. *What Every Middle School Teacher Should Know*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, National Middle School Association, 2000. Print.

Knowles and Brown depict that adolescent life is much different than any other stage of human physical development. Many see it as the transition stage because adolescents are transitioning between childhood and adulthood. Teaching middle school students requires a different level of pedagogy, and this book offers information about the adolescent stage and the changes they are undergoing. This text challenges the behaviors of teachers in the classroom to make sure that what educators are not doing is socially and emotionally disturbing the child. Once that happens, their cognitive development is altered and the student’s academic achievement is affected. Also, in reaching the adolescents, purposeful learning is of highest priority. Middle-schoolers thrive with hands-on learning, and teachers that are guiding, not dictating, are better suited for this age level. Applying the principles suggested by Knowles and Brown will definitely improve the middle school classroom.

Kellilyn J. Sechrest

Rosenblatt, Louise M. "The Literary Experience." *Literature as Exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1995. Print.

This book is the foundation for the "Reader Response" approach to both teaching and criticizing literature. The book's second chapter also allows Rosenblatt to state the case for "Reader Response"—all stories are merely ink on a page until a reader constructs them into some coherent form. Rosenblatt builds off of this assertion that literature is an experience, and that the reader's emotions or preconceived ideas are separate from the content of a text. She concludes that, to build successful readers, we must capitalize on their experience of reading and not battle to rewrite what has been transposed or taken from a text.

D. Smith

Tobias, Cynthia Ulrich. *The Way They Learn*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994. Print.

Is everyone the same? Does everyone learn in the same way? The first question is often very easily answered—of course not! Each person is a unique and special individual with distinct characteristics and abilities. However, most people find difficulty in understanding that others may learn and process concepts and information in various ways. In the book *The Way They Learn*, the author, Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, examines and explains the primary types of learning styles and their characteristics. In this way, the reader can determine his or her dominant learning style and gain a thorough knowledge about other learning styles as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

The Way They Learn is such an amazing book and an invaluable classroom tool! Before reading this text, I was aware of a few discrepancies between learning styles, but I was entirely unacquainted with the extent of the categorization of characteristics and abilities for each learning style. Furthermore, I previously had relatively few methods and strategies for accommodating the diverse needs of students, but this book is a fantastic resource that I know I will keep in my desk at school and utilize time and time again! This book has helped me gain a powerful amount of knowledge and understanding about learning styles that I know I will use daily in my classroom.

N. Smith