Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 20
Issue 2 *Reading Matters*

Article 2

1-1-2004

Opening Words: "All those lines and Circles:" Literacy, Literature, and Reading

Jonathan Bush

Allen Webb

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/lajm

Recommended Citation
Bush, Jonathan and Webb, Allen (2004) "Opening Words: "All those lines and Circles:" Literacy, Literature, and Reading," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 20: Iss. 2, Article 2.
Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1223

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Language Arts Journal of Michigan by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Opening Words:
"All those lines and Circles:" Literacy, Literature, and Reading

Jonathan Bush and Allen Webb,
Editors

all those lines and circles, to me, a mystery
Eve pull down the apple and give taste to me
If she could it would be wonderful
then I wouldn't need someone else's eyes
to see what's in front of me
no one guiding me

it makes me humble
to be so green
at what every kid can do
when he learns A to Z

all those lines and circles
just frighten me and I fear that I'll be trampled
if you don't reach for me
before I run I'll have to take a fall
and then pick myself up, so slowly
I'll devour every one of those
books in the tower of knowledge

— 10,000 Maniacs, "Cherry Tree" (*In My Tribe*, Electra/ Asylum Records, 1987)

Our colleague and good friend Constance Weaver writes in the preface to *Reading Process and Practice* (2002) that "Effective instruction stems from a sensitive, informed response to student needs." Weaver has dedicated much of her career to valuing the work that teachers are doing, particularly when that work is designed in ways that respond effectively to student needs in reading and literacy. It is in this vein, and the implicit messages that surround it and the rest of Connie's work on reading, that we developed this issue of the *Language Arts Journal of Michigan.*

In the song "Cherry Tree" Natalie Merchant of the band 10,000 Maniacs relates a situation most teachers have witnessed, dealt with, and, indeed, felt during their teaching career. Writing from the perspective of an illiterate adult, she relates the frustration and fear that comes from the inability to read. Such experiences are not only those of adults, but of children as well. Much like Merchant's 'apple', the prize of literacy seems so close and easy to reach to those of us with the ability, yet it is so elusive to those who don't possess the ability to reach up and grab it. It is our responsibility, as teachers, mentors, and guides, to help those students, through our abilities, skills, and knowledge to bring the love of reading to that student – to design instruction that comes from that "sensitive, informed response" to individual student needs. Only in doing so will we truly serve the reading needs of our students.

In this issue we strayed slightly from our original goal of focusing solely on reading and literacy, and have traversed into literature, studying, and writing. In this eclectic mix of articles, the guiding concepts of reading, teaching reading, and literacy are seen in various ways.

What all our authors have in common, though, is that they value reading as an important part of life and the English language arts classroom — from early education through the middle and secondary grades to college and beyond. This is an important point. Reading is the responsibility of all teachers – English language arts and beyond.

This issue begins a section focused on 'the joy and power of reading.' In these articles, we are confronted with the importance of reading in the lives of ourselves and others — and how we can share our love of reading — as readers and educators — with others. In her article "For the Love of Reading" Zsuzsanna Palmer does what many wonderful teachers do by drawing inspiration from a negative experience, turning it into a mantra and a calling for her own teaching and using what was done to her as a reader as an example of what she never wants to do to her students. The result is a classroom where reading, or more specifically, the cultivation of the love of reading, is the goal. Tara Autrey then invites us into her classroom as she creates an environment in which her students learn to share the love of reading. Her "Star Books Café" is

as much about celebration as it is about reading. Thus, her students step beyond their roles as students and become "coffee house diners … intrinsically motivated to step inside English language arts…." Next, Amy Tomblinson invites us to consider the power of 'real reading' and the reluctant reader. As Tomblinson shows, all students have special needs, and teachers must develop reading programs that help those readers become engaged and interested in reading.

The issue then continues with a focus on 'teaching literature, teaching reading.' Too often, we see a split develop where many teachers forget that teaching literature is also an exercise in reading instruction. Our authors in this section break down this myth to expose the common connections that bring the two together. In "Living the Story" Carl Young and Allyson Young discuss *The Scarlet Letter.* They display ways to create the love of reading through performance and personal engagement within a text that has the potential to turn off many readers. Kia Jane Richmond and Johanna Delorey then show an exciting example of student-teacher collaboration as they describe the experience of reading, discussing, and writing about young adult literature in a college setting. It is easy to see how the love of teaching and reading finds a place in both these classrooms.

Pam B. Cole then continues the discussion in her piece describing how reading and responding to texts can "provide opportunities for students to read and discuss issues that affect their school lives" and help them "navigate school culture." For Cole, reading is a way to deal with adolescent issues such as early maturation, special needs, bullying, failure, student/teacher relationships and others.

Then, Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil and C.J. Gilbert describe how technology can be used as a tool to help students engage in reading. Using online-discussion as a medium, they show the "tremendous potential to foster productive learning" of this technology.

We conclude this section with a piece from Kelli Kilbourn, describing the value of Sharon Draper's *Romiette and Julio* as a tool for fostering engaged reading in her classroom. Kilbourn asks that other teachers use her ideas for their own classrooms as they experiment with their own ideas.

The issue then takes a short detour into the college classroom, where regular *LAJM* Contributor Julie Mix teaches us how reading and writing can contribute to the literacy of college students struggling to learn in a new, more rigorous context. Then, Dawn Dolly continues this discussion by advocating for metacognitive reading strategies in a college setting. Both these articles strengthen the notion that reading instruction is the realm of all teachers.

We finish with a series of resources for teachers. Candice C. Hollingsead, Raymond J. Ostrander, and Julie Schilling present a wonderful resource that theorizes and positions the 'study guide' as a tool for teachers of students at all levels. Then, Michelle Deveraux and Amanda Otto create an excellent introductory bibliography of resources for teaching reading that will "show teachers they are not alone in fostering life-long literacy." Finally, Mary Ellen Van Camp contributes "The Orphan Trains: Michigan and Beyond" -- a bibliographic article of resources and discussion that would have also been a great addition to our recent 'Celebrating Teaching in Michigan' issue. She offers a solid addition to this issue, showing us how history, culture, and literature can all add to our students' love of reading.

Karen Vocke, our colleague from Western Michigan University, completes the issue. We asked Karen to provide a closing voice and comment to provide context and continuity to the issue. Using her extensive background as an experienced teacher and teacher educator of reading and literacy, Karen captures the voices, tones, and ideas of the issue with a keen eye and a strong sense of reading theory and practice.

We look forward to our next issue -- *Writing Matters* -- a companion in literacy to this issue. Our Northern Michigan University colleague Kia Jane Richmond will be our guest co-editor. We are excited about the opportunity to work with Kia and seeing all your ideas as they come in to us.