Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 9 | Issue 1

1-1-1993

Front Matter

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

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1599

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.
ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This is our final issue as co-editors of LAJM. It has been a good run. From the beginning, we have tried to present a journal that is sound, practical, and—perhaps most important of all—based upon an abiding respect for young learners. We have had help in our efforts to do so. Above all, we are grateful to the caring teacher-writers whose articles have contributed to the professional growth and optimism of LAJM readers—and to our own as well. We also want to thank our Editorial Board members for their prompt and valuable assistance over the years, helping us decide what to publish and also helping us advise our contributors about revision. On the publishing side, we appreciate the efforts of Marty Haywood at the Wizards of Words and Rhonda Kohler at Central Michigan University Printing Services. Finally, we want to thank our Associate Editor, Jill Van Antwerp, whose diligence and remarkable editorial eye have made an enormous contribution to the quality of the journal.

Consistent with the goals described above, the Spring, 1993 issue of LAJM once again has a "whole language" focus, this time with a special emphasis on literature. On the elementary level, Karen Day and Joyce M. Edwards open with a piece about avoiding the basalization of children's literature, and Eleanor Wollett demonstrates how her reading and writing workshop approach improved her students' spelling skills. On the secondary level, Linda Wyman gives us some good advice about dealing with the pitfalls of teaching poetry, Brian White shows us how to use the authentic questions typical of conversation to help our students engage a piece of literature, and Diana Mitchell provides us with both the theory and practice of a true reader response approach in the literature classroom. Diversity is the implicit theme of our next two pieces: J. Lea Smith and Holly Johnson explain how we can use a thematic literature studies to include several disciplines, while Raymond Kettel provides us with an LAJM Bibliography that will help us approach the homelessness issue in our classrooms. Finally, as we put the journal's future into the capable hands of Diana Mitchell and John Smolens, we take a last look at its past with an updated LAJM Index, a reminder of good reading from our history, a promise of rich resources in English language arts to come.

John Dinan Robert Root, Jr.

AVOIDING THE BASALIZATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Karen Day and Joyce M. Edwards

In recent years, we have witnessed an enormous change in the teaching of reading and the subsequent incorporation of literature and trade books as essential elements in elementary school classrooms. Reading series have been developed which include selections from literature written by well-known and acclaimed writers of literature for children. Clearly, the work of Louise Rosenblatt has been the impetus for much of this change. Her work, and the work of other theorists such as Iser, Holland, Bleich, and Fish, has caused educators to look more critically at their work in the teaching of reading and literature and to examine not only their practice but their beliefs. Fish says, "Not only does one believe what one believes, but one teaches what one believes, even if it would be easier and safer and more satisfying to teach something else" (364). Changing our beliefs, we posit, requires reflection on current practice and knowledge of alternatives.

Louise Rosenblatt, for more than fifty years, has provided us with the raw material for changing our beliefs and our practice (Farrell and Squire ix). Through her studies of the exploration of literature and readers' responses to literature, she developed what she termed a transactional theory of reading. Frequently, the phrase "response to literature" is used to define a wide range of activities. In this article, based on the Latin derivation of the root 'spondere,' response means a promise to engage with the text. This kind of engagement is more than a single reaction, but instead an exploration of the text with repeated readings so that readers can organize and select personally meaningful aspects of text as they create meaning from their reading. This is one of the foundations upon which literary growth is structured.

Rosenblatt maintains that a response is evoked by a transaction with a text. This response is going to be dictated to a considerable extent by the purpose for reading or, in other words, by the stance the reader determines.