

# The Michigan Council of Teachers of English

Motivating and inspiring Michigan's English Language Arts teachers.

Autumn Assembly  
*Many Voices,  
Many Literacies*



Featuring Young Adult  
Author **Jacqueline Woodson**  
and  
Poet **George Ella Lyon**

**Friday, October 30, 2009**  
Lansing Sheraton Hotel  
Lansing, MI

More information  
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## The Michigan English Teacher E-Newsletter

An Email Exclusively for MCTE Members

April 2009

### President's Update

By Mary Anna Kruch, [kruchma@aol.com](mailto:kruchma@aol.com)

### Stepping Outside the Box: How I Came to Tend My Garden



Since spotting the first robins of the season and having been handed a bouquet of new pussy willows yesterday by husband, Bob, I began to think about why I was drawn to teaching as my life calling. The best way to explain is to note my biggest and best surprise about teaching: a boomerang effect of feeling the nurturing warmth of connection, learning, and appreciation right back at me---when here, I thought it was only about discovering the kernels of knowledge in and then supporting

each student's growth as a unique learner!

**Over the years (and I can say this without crossing my fingers behind my back),** I have learned more from my middle school and university students than from any book, lecture, or academic network. My students have been my most remarkable teachers. I have learned from them by working side by side, taking roles of facilitator and guide more often than academic sage. Now that I work at home, I have the luxury of sitting on my deck in the morning with a cup of coffee, looking out at spring's emergence and grateful to see each small change. This varies greatly from when I spent the majority of my days indoors, pushing open the building door at 3:45 PM, only to note the lovely weather I had forgotten to even observe out of the windows. Back then for me, as many now, I cursed the warm weather and the open windows as distractions to the "more important" work inside the classroom.

**Sorry to say that it took me a few years to shake free of the "time on task" nonsense** and take the children outdoors, risking that *look* from the principal. We found all kinds of ways to learn outdoors. Some of the most successful, enjoyable lessons took place under the old maple trees on the grounds of what is now the Williamston Community Center. Many a long afternoon, my classes and I would sit, clutching Scholastic *Scope* magazines, reading a play aloud and discussing the characters. It was good to be someone else for a day, to imagine other settings, and to forget fights with peers or the low math grade.

**Some of my meditations follow as glimpse of a short piece** of the introduction to my book, *Tend Your Garden: Nurturing Motivation in Young Adolescent Writers*, due out early next year. I focus today on my favorite students, young adolescent writers, who, more than ever before, need and deserve our respect. And I can say from the heart that *it's worth every minute*. I start the work, as I do with all chapters, with a quote or lines from a poem. The Introduction of my book opens with this:



***He who plants a tree  
Plants a hope.***

-From "Plant a Tree" by Lucy Larcom (1893)

*Grandma's Garden*  
Kruch Farm near West Branch, MI

**A garden begins as a potentially rich, open field** or smaller, undeveloped plot, ready to accept kernels, bulbs, and seeds full of ample, esoteric beauty and substance. The more careful, consistent the sowing and tending, and the more precise, measured amounts of rich sunlight and nurturing rain, the greater the odds that each plant will reach its full potential.

**Our classrooms are gardens, replete with beauty, possessing untold potential.** It is no mystery that young adolescent children, that is, those children between the ages of about eleven and thirteen, experience their peak physical, intellectual, social, and emotional growth during their middle school years. **Louis Romano** and **Nicholas Geordiady** refer to this time right before adolescence as *transescence*. (1994) (P.17) In their widely cited book, *Building an Effective Middle School* (1994) they speak of the critical value in supporting the continuous positive self-concept of the transescent, especially after elementary school has been left behind.

**Most young adolescent students are no longer highly dependent** upon the scaffolding provided by one or two key adults as in their earlier elementary grades, nor are they little "junior" high school people, who move from class to unrelated class independently, no longer so openly cherished for their individuality—and where the "real" learning of traditional subjects begins. But they do need every bit of our generous nurturing as they live and learn in evolving intellectual, physical, emotional, and social states of development, complicated by the proliferation of adult themes at nearly every turn—and as they attempt to find the places where they best fit in. Each of these states of development has implications for young adolescents, and each will be discussed in the context of learner-centered writing instruction as well as the curriculum as a whole in chapter one.

**While young adolescents are in need of continuous** instruction in academic subjects, they also are in need of hands-on, active learning programs created especially for their variety of wants and needs. In an age of standards and high-stakes testing, we must remember that no test or set of standards could possibly define all that a child can do or has the potential to accomplish. We must look carefully at each student to find his or her individual talents and to foster these in respectful, motivating, and suitable ways—and this is possible within a motivational model of writing.

**I choose to view our young adolescent charges as seedling trees**, looking to us to facilitate their growth as well as celebrate it. I hope you will join me in approaching teaching with the strong passion that danced on the edges of our imaginations when we chose our career paths. Poetess **Lucy Larcom's** quote above reminds us that hope is alive within the sometimes fragile, more often strong seedlings we plant and tenderly nurture.

**Let's remember Larcom's words as we nurture all of our students** this spring, and into the summer. Your influence means much more than you can imagine. And, you may find your work easier, more pleasant, and that elusive desire we all reach for – satisfaction.

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**Work Cited**

Addison, Daniel Dulany. (1894). *Lucy Larcom: Life, Letters, and Diary*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin,).  
Kruch, Mary Anna. (2010). IN PRESS. *Tend Your Garden: Nurturing Motivation in Young Adolescent Writers*. London, UK: Equinox Publishers, Ltd.  
Romano, Louis G., and Geogiady, Nicholas P. (1994). *Building an Effective Middle School*. Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark Publishers.

**Photos from the Kruch Farm**

Here are some of my favorite photographs of Bob's folks' family farm near West Branch, Michigan. I could write several columns about this place, a setting for seven "farm poems" and a set of sketches, which I presented to Mom and Dad on their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Enjoy-

*Mary Anna*



## ***Bright Ideas is April 4 at MSU***

The ***Bright Ideas Conference***, featuring **Donna Jo Napoli** as the keynote speaker, is open for same-day registrations. The conference takes place in the Student Union of Michigan State University at the corner of Abbott Road and Grand River Avenue in East Lansing, Michigan. It begins at 9:00 a.m. Registration after March 26 is \$60.00. More information is available at <http://mienglishteacher.ning.com/>

## ***A New Resource! English Companion***

<http://englishcompanion.ning.com/>



**Jim Burke** created this social network on **Ning**. He invites MCTE members to check it out!

**English Companion**  
where English teachers meet to help each other



## **MCTE Student Affiliate Update**

By Kathy Morcom, President of NCTE-SA at MSU  
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**The National Council of Teachers of English at Michigan State University** has had an impressive member turnout this academic year. With more than 25 elementary and secondary education members, we help prepare pre-service teachers by bringing in the best of the English/Language Arts profession in an array of meeting topics. From Stratford Shakespeare Festival actors to content-based classroom management, our meetings have surely pushed pre-service teachers to step outside of the box.

One such memorable meeting was held on March 16, in which three educators from different school contexts presented on the topic of teaching in non-traditional settings. **Joyce Benvenuto**, retired, joined us to share her experiences from **Meridian Alternative High School**. **Anna J. Small Roseboro** discussed her time spent at an independent school called **The Bishop's School in La Jolla, California**. **Lisa Scharkow** from **Saginaw County Juvenile Detention Center School** was also in attendance at our March meeting. The three panelists explained the differences and similarities of teaching outside of the public school system as well as how to obtain these positions. Our members left the meeting with valuable knowledge, free professional texts—courtesy of Anna J. Small Roseboro, and a fresh outlook on the future of teaching.

This summer, NCTE-SA and the **Greenrock Writers' Retreat** team up to help high school students become effective writers. The Greenrock Writers' Retreat, led by **Dawn Reed** and **Luke Rodesiler**, is held on MSU's campus each June. This year, the retreat begins on June 25 and runs until June 28. NCTE-SA members are volunteering to work with the students in a writing marathon on Saturday, June 27.

NCTE-SA representatives presented as session on student teaching at the **MCTE 2009 Bright Ideas Conference** on April 4. Current interns from several Michigan universities formed a panel to speak with pre-service teachers about this important transition in their lives. Panelists shared tips, anecdotes, and answered audience questions.

## Professional Development Reports-Regions 6 and 9

Despite rainy weather, the **MCTE Region 6** (includes Arenac, Bay, Clare, Clinton, Genesee, Gladwin, Gratiot, Isabella, Lapeer, Midland, Saginaw, and Shiawassee Counties) *Read-Write-Think* Workshop was a success. Ten participants made their way to the **Gratiot Isabella RESD** in Ithaca on Thursday, February 26, 2009 to learn more about the extensive resources NCTE has to offer on its *Read-Write-Think* website. **Rita Maddox** led the workshop and guided the participants through the basics. The teachers had time to explore and collaborate, and many left with ideas that they would be putting to use in the near future. Region 6 Coordinator **Jodi Carlson** organized the workshop.

**MCTE Region 9** (includes Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and Osceola Counties) Event at **Mason-Lake ISD** took place Wednesday, March 11 in Ludington. In addition to an overview of *Read-Write-Think*, participants shared other ELA websites they frequently use.

Participants and their comments:

■ **Sonya Lund, Baldwin Junior High School**

"*Read-Write-Think* is an awesome website filled with great ideas, lesson plans, student tools and resources. I am glad I was given the chance to 'Surf 'the Web!'"

■ **Kathy Buter, Covenant Christian School**

"Thank you for the wonderful website info. I enjoy the time to explore and enhance my teaching."

■ **Karen Mazur, Mason County Central**

"It was wonderful to just have the time to explore, something I never have time to do."

■ **Dency Lippert, Manistee Area Public Schools**

"Rita helped us navigate through *Read-Write-Think*-a resource I knew about but wasn't using to its full potential. I will share the rich, accessible resource with my district's teachers."

■ **Danielle Luce, Mason County Eastern Schools, Custer**

"It is such a great opportunity to get together with fellow teachers because we are so willing to share ideas, resources, and skills. Exposure to such a great website was very beneficial."

■ **Christa Millspaugh, O.J. DeJonge Middle School, Ludington**

"Spending time exploring the website with other teachers was beneficial. Often we don't get the opportunity to explore sites that are helpful and give us instructional materials to use in our classrooms."

■ **Stephanie Oden, Manistee Middle School**

"What a worthwhile evening at Mason-Lake ISD. Rita Maddox shared an invaluable website. It allowed me a change to explore a variety of effective resources and practices for my reading and language arts curriculum. The best part was the information is free and it just takes time to investigate what works best for my students' learning needs as readers and writers. Thanks IRA and NCTE for giving me an exciting window into my teaching."

■ **Jen Orton, Mason-Lake ISD**

"It was wonderful to hear more opportunities with MCTE. Teachers enjoyed searching for lessons from the *Read-Write-Think* site. In addition, teachers had a chance to share what was working well in their own classrooms."

■ **Mary Scheffler, Mason County Central**

"The *Read-Write-Think* workshop was great because I learned of many awesome websites to use for the classroom."

**From NCTE**  
**Take Part in the *National Day on Writing*-October 20, 2009**

**MCTE, You, and the National Day of Writing**  
<http://www.ncte.org/action/dayonwriting>

Voting is almost certainly the most important political action that most of us will ever take. I'm convinced, however, that most of us learn to take political stands bit by bit, stepping carefully along an uncertain path until we feel more confident. I encourage you to read the excerpted text below and make a note to incorporate one or more of the listed October 20 **National Day of Writing** suggestions into your classroom, school, or district plans for fall. Take the little bit of time required, get your students involved, and perhaps their parents as well. Then be ready to take a bolder stand when the occasion arises. **-Ellen Brinkley, [Ellen.brinkley@wmich.edu](mailto:Ellen.brinkley@wmich.edu)**

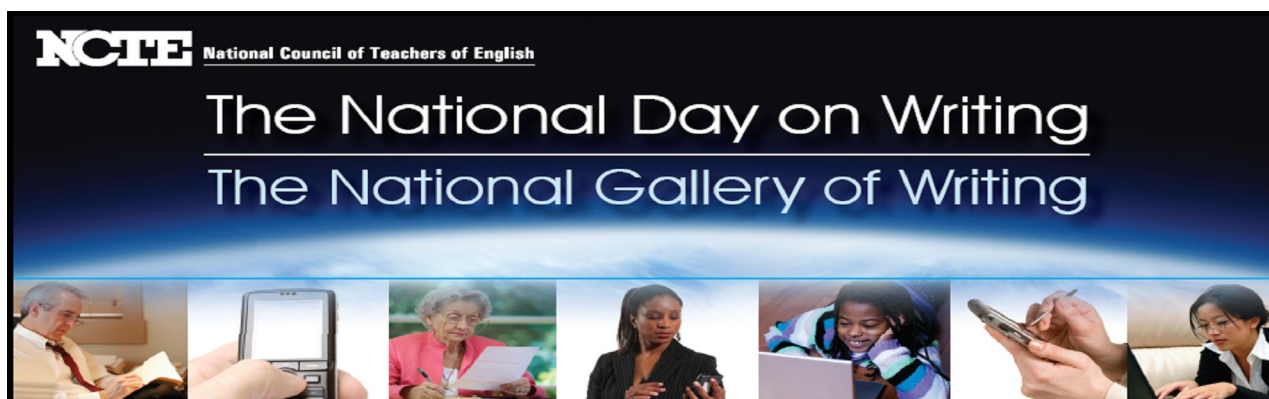
The National Day of Writing, October 20, 2009 will involve as many NCTE and MCTE members as possible in creating "local galleries and supportive resources" for those want to support and/or seek help with writing. NCTE hopes to attract mass participation, and they will invite writers to upload work to a space that can be visited by a wide audience. They also intend to provide easy access to the kinds of "useful tools and advice for writers that so many of our members have already created."

NCTE says that it is not about money, but about providing a "dignified virtual space—like a museum gallery or library display—where thousands of writers will be proud to voluntarily display their work."

National spokespersons point out that "people remain loyal to organizations that share their values, that provide them with an outlet for participation, and that celebrate their accomplishments." They explain that, "...reaching out to groups outside the education sector—service clubs, after school programs, community groups, or unions/civic/religious organizations—is essential in a time of diminishing resources."

Here are just a few how-you-can-get-involved suggestions:

1. Submit something you've written to the National Gallery.
  2. Start a local gallery site for your affiliate, school, or a community group.
  3. Contact your U.S. Congressional representative to ask for support of a resolution to establish October 20, 2009, as the National Day on Writing.
  4. Encourage your students, and where appropriate, their parents to participate in the National Gallery or National Day initiatives.
  5. Write to journalists or school board members in your community about the initiative, and about what you know about the teaching of writing.
  6. Reach out to teachers of other subject areas in your school or institution and encourage them to participate in the National Gallery or National Day initiatives.
  7. Host an event that focuses on writing on October 20; celebrate writing by posting samples or encouraging authors to read from their work.
  8. Ask local authorities in your community to recognize October 20 as a Day on Writing.
  9. Read through submissions to the Gallery and help parents and non-educators notice the range and depth of pieces submitted.
- Excerpted by Ellen Brinkley, Western Michigan University



## Toby's Teaching Tip

By Toby Kahn-Loftus, Region 10 Coordinator and President-Elect  
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### Why Use Learning Logs, Journals, Wonder Books or Notebooks?

No matter what age or subject you may teach, having a specific tool for your students to capture and organize their work for your class is essential to student learning. Whether it's a spiral notebook, a sewn composition book, a small 3-ring binder, or a laptop, the creation of a consistent place and space for students to record and store their notes, reflections, questions, connections, and research is critical to deep learning. Log books and journals have multiple important functions in every classroom:

- They create a consistent place for students to track their thinking and actually watch their learning grow. ("We're smarter today than we were yesterday." **Cris Tovani**)
- They make excellent formative assessments and also produce a rich assessment of student learning over an entire trimester or semester.
- They are a consistent place where students can make observations, create lists, ask questions, raise concerns, write reflections, and explain their understanding. Teachers can glimpse at a set of log books and know instantly if the students are on track or struggling.
- Notebooks are the perfect tool for almost any "writing to learn" invitation (2-Column Notes, RAFT Assignments, Self-Evaluations, Quick Writes, etc...)
- Log books are also a place where teachers can pose thoughtful questions, give critical feedback, engage reluctant learners, and differentiate instruction.
- Finally, they also make excellent tools for reflective parent conferences and student led conferences.

<http://asai.indstate.edu/guidingallkids/studentledconferencing.htm>



I always kept our middle school reading journals, writing notebooks, and Social Studies Logbooks in the classroom. They were highly valued and students had to sign them out like the classroom library books or their writing portfolio if they wanted to take them home. We did homework in a separate folder and if necessary glued or stapled homework pages into their log books or journal. This was a bit like the interactive notebook model.

(<http://uweb.txstate.edu/teachamhistory/lessons/notebook.pdf>)

Logbooks and journals are places where students can find their voice and where teachers can provide individualized instruction. If you haven't used this type multifaceted tool for teaching and learning, perhaps you might consider giving them a try.

The **Interactive Notebook resource** is located on the MCTE Ning.

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Specific questions about content, length and style should be directed to the editors.

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