

The Michigan Council of Teachers of English

Motivating and inspiring Michigan's English Language Arts teachers.

The Michigan English Teacher E-Newsletter

An Email Exclusively for MCTE Members

February 2009

**Bright Ideas
Conference**
Saturday,
April 4, 2009
Michigan State
University



Contact Reade Dornan
dornan@msu.edu
for more information

President's Update

By Mary Anna Kruch, kruchma@aol.com



Cha-Cha-Cha-Changes

In the midst of cold Michigan winter days, we can find much for which to rejoice—and to reflect upon. Like many across the nation and world, I watched [Barack H. Obama](#) take the oath of office as our 44th president on January 20, 2009, under a sunny Washington D. C. sky. And like many, I anticipate new winds of change. While I disagree with his choice of Education Secretary, [Arne Duncan](#), I believe that President Obama's open-minded, collegial approach to tackling large problems can generate possible solutions.

Those unfamiliar with Education Secretary Duncan can take a look at how he has affected Chicago Public Schools here: <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1866783,00.html>. From where I sit, Duncan is someone who bears watching, because while his intentions support schools as a public investment in student learning, his actions reflect a more corporate view of schools as a place to produce public, manufactured goods. [Henry A. Giroux](#) and [Kenneth Saltman](#), critical pedagogy scholars, note that the continued emphasis on standardized tests, as *the* measure of students' learning, is problematic. Take a look at their thoughts here: <http://www.truthout.org/121708R?> I think that some disagreement as to how to improve education, particularly as it relates to students' literacy, is healthy and prompts necessary discussion. As long as educators continue to make their voices heard our students can reap positive benefits.

Obama regularly "reaches across the aisle" to consult with Democrat and Republican congressional leaders and professionals in order to consider many points of view. It will be interesting to see if our new leader continues to weigh in with grass roots organizations and those in the trenches, classroom teachers. [Millie Davis](#) and [Kent Williamson](#), National Council of Teachers of English spokespersons, have urged teachers to contact their congressional representatives with their thoughts about the evolving educational policy in this new administration. The NCTE leaders make an excellent point: teachers at all levels are the experts in this field, and we have much wisdom and counsel to offer those who would create national policy. Those wishing to contact Michigan's U. S. Senators and Representatives can find contact information listed below, found at infomi@infomi.com:

DON'T KNOW WHAT DISTRICT YOU ARE IN?
CHECK OUT THE NEW DISTRICT MAP!

United States Senate http://www.senate.gov/		
Deborah Stabenow http://stabenow.senate.gov/		
Carl Levin http://levin.senate.gov/contact/		
United States House of Representatives		
Michigan 1st	Bart Stupak (D)	stupak@mail.house.gov
Michigan 2nd	Peter Hoekstra (R)	E-Mail Congressman Hoekstra
Michigan 3rd	Vernon Ehlers (R)	www.house.gov/writerep
Michigan 4th	Dave Camp (R)	E-Mail Congressman Camp
Michigan 5th	Dale Kildee (D)	E-Mail Services
Michigan 6th	Fred Upton (R)	E-Mail Congressman Upton
Michigan 7th	Joe Schwarz (R)	Email Form
Michigan 8th	Mike Rogers (R)	http://www.mikerogers.house.gov/Contact.aspx
Michigan 9th	Joe Knollenberg (D)	E-Mail Congressman Knollenberg
Michigan 10th	Candice S. Miller (D)	www.house.gov/writerep
Michigan 11th	Thaddeus G. McCotter (R)	E-Mail Congressman McCotter
Michigan 12th	Sander Levin (D)	slevin@mail.house.gov
Michigan 13th	Carolyn Kilpatrick (D)	www.house.gov/writerep/
Michigan 14th	John Conyers, Jr. (D)	www.house.gov/writerep
Michigan 15th	John D. Dingell (D)	E-Mail Congressman Dingell

On a bright note, *Education Week* recently reported that Obama has already made schools a priority by sending a \$700 billion stimulus package to Capitol Hill and has pledged to “put people back to work by modernizing schools that are failing our children.” The new president has promised to rehabilitate the nation’s schools by repairing buildings and installing energy-efficient systems. Mr. Obama’s advisers have proposed \$3 billion to upgrade and expand preschools and could also move to upgrade charter schools serving poor communities, although many teachers’ unions would prefer to keep infrastructure dollars in traditional schools.

[Bruce Fuller](#), the author of “Economic Recovery, Educational Renewal” in *Education Week* (January 14), suggests that the new president should avoid symbolic gestures, such as buying more computers for schools and should, rather, stay focused on the key elements of infrastructure: bolstering school facilities staffed by able, committed teachers. I tend to agree with that. What do you think?

If you would like to write an opinion piece for this newsletter, regarding these or other issues, please contact [Rita Maddox](#). wjmaddox1@comcast.net. Perspectives can also be shared on our new ning. See below!

MCTE's New Ning

Over the past month, you may have beheld a magnificent sight/site! MCTE Webmaster, [Rob Rozema](#), created the MCTE ning, a social network for members to communicate with one another, take part in discussions, write and post blogs, and download photos and videos, among other things. If you have not yet taken a look, Rob and I invite you to join our new social network. Click on the link below to join!

See you soon!

Mary Anna

References Cited

Fuller, Bruce. (1-21-09). "Economic Recovery, Educational Renewal." *Education Week*.

Giroux, Henry A., and Saltman, K. "Obama's Betrayal of Public Education? Arne Duncan and the Corporate Model of Schooling." *Truthout*. Downloaded at <http://truthout.org/121708R?> on 1- 21-09.

Pickert, Kate. (12-17-08). "Education Secretary Arne Duncan." *Time.com*. Downloaded at <http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1867011,00.html?iid=sphere-inline-bottom> on 1-21-09.

Join me on Michigan Council of Teachers of English



Robert Rozema
MCTE Webmaster

We are pleased to invite your to join our new social network, where you can keep a blog, upload videos, and connect with other English teachers. Check it out!

<http://mienglishteacher.ning.com>

Toby's Teaching Tip

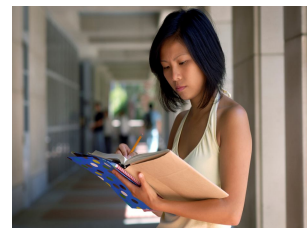
By_Toby Kahn-Loftus, Region 10 Coordinator and President-Elect tobykahnloftus@gmail.com

Reading like Writers

In [Katie Wood Ray's](#) illuminating text, *Wondrous Wordsⁱ*, Ray helps us understand many key concepts that lead to a "descriptive" approach in teaching writing. One of those key concepts is teaching students how to read like a writer. "Writing well," Ray explains, "involves learning to attend to the *craft* of writing, learning to do the sophisticated work of separating *what it's about* from *how it is written*." Using Ray's model from her chapter "Organized Inquiry," I recently worked with a group of fifth graders to read and discuss an excerpt from [Sandra Cisneros](#) *House on Mango Street*.¹ After engaging fifth graders in a shared reading of "My Name," I guided them through a discussion of "What is the Author Doing?" with a simple graphic organizer. I've included a Word template for you to use with your own students, along with an example of one of the craft elements that my fifth graders named on their first attempt with this model. This type of rich noticing with students doesn't have to be complicated or oppressive. This strategy is a great reminder that powerful practice can be easy to implement, especially if we start with wonderful texts to engage and invite student writers to do what our favorite authors do.

¹ Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1999
New York: Vintage, 1991

Resources to implement this Teaching Tip: PDFs of the graphic organizer and template for this tip are located just below the link for the newsletter on the new site!



Upcoming Professional Development-Regions 6 and 8 February 28 and March 11

Partnering with [Gratiot-Isabella RESD](#) and [Mason-Lake ISD](#), MCTE Regions 6 and 9 will offer regional professional development. The sessions focus on *Read-Write-Think*, the NCTE/IRA resource for teachers of English Language Arts.

MCTE Region 6 (includes Arenac, Bay, Clare, Clinton, Genesee, Gladwin, Gratiot, Isabella, Lapeer, Midland, Saginaw, and Shiawassee Counties) Event at GIRESD in Ithaca is Thursday, February 28 from 4-6 p.m.

MCTE Region 9 (includes Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and Osceola Counties) Event at Newaygo County RESA is Wednesday, March 11 in Ludington from 4-6 p.m.

For registration information, contact [Jodi Carlson](#)-MCTE Region 6 Coordinator, Carlson@pw.k12.mi.us and [Rita Maddox](#)-MCTE Region 9 Coordinator, wjmaddox1@comcast.net

Region 6 Spotlight-*Literacy Leaders*

By [Jodi Carlson](#), Region 7 Coordinator, Carlson@pw.k12.mi.us

[Shiawassee RESD](#) and [Clinton County RESA](#) have offered a three part professional development for *Literacy Leaders* in their districts. The participants have met twice, and have had the opportunity to explore new ideas and share techniques that work.

The participants come together with ideas and lessons that they use in their classrooms. The agenda allows time for collaboration in addition to presentations by other educators. All of the time is hands-on and teachers leave with real examples of lessons and activities to use in their classrooms.

[Lauren Iszler](#) of [Pewamo-Westphalia Schools](#) commented, "I really enjoy collaborating with other teachers from different districts within Clinton and Shiawassee counties. The giving and sharing of ideas inspires me to create new lessons that are both engaging and effective. I leave *Literacy Leaders* feeling rejuvenated and full of new ideas."

By participating in *Literacy Leaders*, teachers are able to meet and converse with other teachers from neighboring school districts.

[Jessica Hilewsky](#) of [Corunna High School](#) added, "We love to share our ideas of what has worked well in the classroom. I have already been able to use some of these ideas in my own classroom and it is been extremely helpful. I have implemented the use of the Idea Organizers into my English I course. Idea Organizers are a unique way for students to start writing a creative story in Writer's Notebooks."

The opportunity provides valuable time for collaboration, which is what has made it such a success. For more information about *Literacy Leaders*, contact [Sue Stephens](#) at Shiawassee RESD stephens@sresd.org

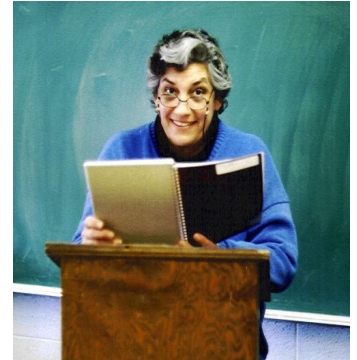
Teacher Spotlight: Penelope "Pen" Campbell, Region 8

By Jennifer Swisher, Region 8 Coordinator, Jenswish@remc11.K12.mi.us

Southwestern Michigan is alive with brilliant educators who are dedicated to the learning of their students. One of these educators is St. Joseph High School teacher **Penelope "Pen" Campbell**. Pen is a region VIII member who teaches courses in College Writing and Writing for Publication, and she is the advisor for the school newspaper

At the beginning of her career, Pen taught homebound students in Chicago, Illinois, in a "door-to-door" format before moving to Michigan. Once in Michigan, Pen took a lengthy sabbatical from education to raise her children. When she returned to the classroom, she taught at Lake Michigan Catholic Middle/High School. After nine years at Lake Michigan Catholic, Pen accepted her current position at **St. Joseph High**.

In 1996, Pen got the opportunity to become involved with the Third Coast Writing Project through Western Michigan University, which has been a "marvelous opportunity" for her. In 2000, she became involved in a three-year research initiative to improve writing in rural schools across the nation. She was one of fifty teachers in six sites across the nation to participate in the initiative. Pen continues her involvement in the Third Coast Writing Project by leading summer sessions. Educators interested in becoming involved in the Third Coast Writing Project should visit the project website at <http://www.wmich.edu/thirdcoastwp/>.



Being a part of this initiative allowed Pen to embrace the use of digital storytelling in the classroom. She is "really interested in digital storytelling as a multimodal composition, not just as a format for narrative." Pen believes that the techniques used in creating digital stories are incredibly rich. "Students are drenched in digital media all the time. Composing in a digital format is just as important as composing writing in a traditional format."

Pen's experience teaching digital storytelling is so extensive that the Pearson Foundation has contacted her to share her experience with educators across the United States. The Pearson Foundation teamed with the National Writing Project to create an online series "designed to explore, document and share the experiences and recommendations of professional educators on innovative instructional strategies in the classroom." The foundation has created a website that highlights the successes of educators who have participated in the research initiative. To learn more about the project, download valuable resources, and discover Pen's advice on incorporating digital storytelling in the classroom, visit <http://pearsonfoundation.org/NWP/ProfilesInPractice/2008/index.html>. Pen's professional website (<http://sjschools.org/16182042310712113/site/default.asp>) also includes tips and handouts that will be helpful to educators who use digital storytelling in the classroom.

Teacher Spotlight: Heather Jordan, Region 11

By Kia Jane Richmond, Region 11 Co-coordinator and Vice President,
krichmon@nmu.edu



Heather Jordan is a new member of MCTE and a teacher at **North Star Academy High School/Polaris Middle School** in Marquette. She is in her seventh year of teaching English and Social Studies at the charter school, which seeks to "personalize teaching and curriculum, and make students' work the center of classroom activity."

In addition to promoting writing-across the curriculum and arts-integrated lessons, Jordan serves as the yearbook advisor, student council advisor, and a supervisor of student teachers. Two fascinating facts about MCTE member Heather Jordan are that she is a champion in *Muay Thai* fighting and she creates/sells garden art.

Kia Jane Richmond and Heather Jordan, MCTE Fall Conference Oct. 200

Region 11 Report

By Kia Jane Richmond, Region 11 Co-coordinator and Vice President,
krichmon@nmu.edu

Fall MCTE Conference in Lansing

Seven faculty, students, and graduates from Northern Michigan University attended the MCTE Fall Conference on October 3, 2008, in Lansing. [Grace Chaillier](#) (Native American Studies) presented "Rewriting Family Memoir: Developing Short Exercises into Longer Narratives" and was a featured panelist in a session titled "Critical Conversations on Issues of Art, Writing, & Culture." [Michael D. Martin](#) (English) presented "Crossing the Bridge: 'Whiteness' and African American Literature," [Kia Jane Richmond](#) (English) presented "Preparing and Inviting Teachers into Leadership and Scholarship." Chaillier, Martin, and [Markisha Smith](#) (Education) were sponsored by Richmond as members of the Michigan Teachers for the Dream program. Also attending the conference were [Heather Jordan](#) (North Star Academy teacher, NMU grad), [Kate Aho](#) (English), and [Mark Smith](#) (English --- all helped work with registration and/or the teacher dollar store at the conference. Many thanks to these U.P. folks! (Note: The experience attending the MCTE conference was enriched by the fourteen-hour, round trip car ride during which discussions of writing, grammar, and literature were heard above the sound of crunching snacks in the van. ☺

Fall Educator Conference in Marquette

MCTE Region 11 Coordinators Kia Jane Richmond and [Tom Hyslop](#) invited teachers of English Language Arts to participate in a workshop entitled "Best Practices in Teaching Secondary English: Discussions of Effective Strategies and Concepts in English Language Arts" as a part of the Marquette-Alger Regional Education Service Agency's Fall Educator Conference.

Twenty-two (22) middle school, high school, and college English teachers met on October 10, 2008, to discuss the following topics: recent developments in best practice in secondary English, lesson planning/unit development with state high school content expectations, the place of literature/genre in the classroom; fabulous ideas for writing instruction, and professional development opportunities through the Michigan Council of Teachers of English.

In a follow-up email to session participants, Tom Hyslop noted, "What was once a profession of shared ideas has become a series of isolated islands, where we all wonder if there is anyone out there experiencing what we experience in our classrooms. We need closer contact, and today was a good start toward that end." Session attendees were also given the link for Tom's amazing website <http://myweb.nmu.edu/~thyslop/tom.htm>

Calendar



The [Read Write Think Calendar](#) offers classroom activities and online resources associated with events in literacy and literature. Check out the February and March pages: <http://www.readwritethink.org/calendar/>

MCTE Executive Council

President	Mary Anna Kruch	mask92369@gmail.com
President-Elect	Toby Kahn-Loftus	tobykahnloftus@gmail.com
Vice President	Kia Jane Richmond	krichmon@nmu.edu
Past President	Fred Barton	bartonf@msu.edu
Secretary-Treasurer	Ray H. Lawson	Rlawson48309@yahoo.com
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College Co-Chair	Samantha Caughlan	caughlan@msu.edu
LAJM Co-Editor	Kia-Jane Richmond	krichmon@nmu.edu
LAJM Co-Editor	W. Douglas Baker	wbakerii@emu.edu
MET Co-Editor	Rita Maddox	wjmaddox1@comcast.net
MET Co-Editor	Geneva Scully	gscully26@gmail.com
Region 1 Coordinator	Mary C. Cox	cissycox@aol.com
Region 2 Coordinator	Deonna Montei	dmontei@litconsultingllc.com
Region 3 Coordinator	Valerie Johnson	Kimme.nuckles@baker.edu
Region 5 Coordinator	Reade Dornan	dornan@msu.edu
Region 6 Coordinator	Jodi Carlson	Carlson@pw.k12.mi.us
Region 7 Coordinator	Toby Kahn-Loftus	tobykahnloftus@gmail.com
Region 8 Coordinator	Jennifer Swisher	Jenswish@remc11.K12.mi.us
Region 9 Coordinator	Rita Maddox	wjmaddox1@comcast.net
Region 10 Coordinator	Kent Case	kcase@concordpetoskey.com
Region 11 Coordinator	Tom Hyslop	thyslop@nmu.edu
Region 11 Co-Coordinator	Kia-Jane Richmond	krichmon@nmu.edu
	Fred Barton	bartonf@msu.edu
Membership	Ray Lawson	Rlawson48309@yahoo.com
SLATE	Ellen Brinkley	Ellen.brinkley@wmich.edu
NCTE Liaison	Kia-Jane Richmond	krichmon@nmu.edu
Student Affiliate	Kathy Morcom	morcomka@msu.edu
MDE Liaison	Lynnette VanDyke	vandykel@michigan.gov

The Michigan English Teacher E-Newsletter is published monthly and accepts short articles, reviews and opinion pieces on matters of importance to teachers of English Language Arts K-12.

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

Rita Maddox, Co-Editor wjmaddox1@comcast.net
Geneva Scully, Co-Editor gscully26@gmail.com