

The Michigan Council of Teachers of English

Motivating and inspiring Michigan's English Language Arts teachers.

Save the Date!

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
tobykahnloftus@gmail.com

Call for Proposals
Due July 31, 2009

Conference Flyer
<http://mienglishteacher.ning.com/page/conferences-1>

The Michigan English Teacher E-Newsletter

An Email Exclusively for MCTE Members

May 2009

President's Update

By Mary Anna Kruch, kruchma@aol.com



Young Adult Literature As a Means to Ease Their Pain *and* Soothe Their Souls

"Young adult novels seek to capture the intensity of adolescence, where truth is a pure value, exposure and secrecy are constant themes, and readers feel alienation with first force."

Marc Aronson (1997) in *Book List*

As of late, I have been re-reading many novels in my y. a. collection, remembering the joy that reading many of these aloud to students at this time of the year brought—both to the students and to me. Beyond the sheer enjoyment of these mostly realistic fiction titles, the stories provided a wealth of benefits for students. Like **Kevin Costner** in *Field of Dreams*, teachers keep an eye out for critical literacy that may *ease the pain* of teen angst, particularly students' struggle with surviving the realities of school and home. Accomplishing both may be a tall order, unless we are still able to recall the skin we were in as teens and tweens. I took to my room a lot, and I got lost in reading everything I could get my hands on. Back then as now, literature was a place in which to lose myself. Our students need the same, but with a twist:

Young adults need their own literature, stories that speak of their experiences, are in their own language, and do not talk down to them.

This last part about R-E-S-P-E-C-T can be a problem solved when students propose titles to be read aloud. As students move through the mire of middle school and into high school, there is a traditional decrease in their time spent reading books they enjoy. At the same time, adolescents are exposed to a growing variety of media choices, so getting the word out to them about the pleasure and sense of achievement that reading can bring is imperative. YA literature of all genres has the potential to provide a more critical, mature understanding of self and of the world. Plots focus on the experiences of an individual, usually a teen protagonist, with a sense of immediacy in the search of answers. Adolescents this age often reach for realistic literature that mirrors life, and it is one way to provide opportunities for adolescents to learn about human behavior and how people interact and get along with one another, meet people who are experiencing some of the same emotions that they are, and use the characters' experiences as guides in handling the difficult challenges that arise with divorce, death, and moving (**Mitchell**, 2003).

I think of this genre, realistic fiction, as the most helpful and healing for young adolescent readers, and I would like to suggest that one of the best ways to invite critical literacy and getting students to read more is through the reading aloud of realistic fiction.

Reading aloud to adolescents is a highly under-used, potentially powerful act.

Of particular interest to students is whether the young adult literature they are exposed to presents them in authentic ways. For example, what kind of experiences does the novel present as typical for this age? Are the characters recognizable in any ways? What is of interest to teens? And, have we ever asked them to tell us why?

If we can get students to engage with literature, it is conceivable they will be able respond to it more deeply, being better able to synthesize and analyze.

Potential discussion and response writing could amaze and dazzle both teachers and students alike. *But for engagement to occur there must be a hook.* As Western society has had less need for youth to enter the work force at an early age, and additional education became socially and financially necessary for greater numbers of people, the period of transition between childhood and adulthood has become extended. So the distinct “adolescent” period was created. A traditional beginning point for the concept of young adult literature was **S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*** in 1967. And this movement occurred mainly with historical fiction. The new fiction, as it was called, tended to explore the social institutions and conventions that shape adolescent universes. Novels dealing with problems particular to this group such as sexuality or the discovery of one’s mortality have continued to be written to help ease adolescents discover a sense of identity. For many, this is the hook. **Walter Dean Myers**, speaking in 1999, defined the role of literature for young adults: “Literature gives strategies for living.” Having observed young adults of many ages over a thirty-five year period, I would have to strongly agree.

I invite educators to nominate their students’ favorite books to assist me in compiling a list for those of us who continue to search for ways to ease their pain.

Perhaps the suggested nominations on the list will encourage some to read aloud for the sheer joy of it, as in reading to end each class hour you meet as a parting gift. Or, perhaps some may consider including some of these novels as choices in future literature circles and book clubs.

Here are some nominations thus far:

- ***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* - Sherman Alexie**
- ***Deadline* – Chris Crutcher**
- ***Whale Talk* – Chris Crutcher**
- ***Dacey’s Song* – Cynthia Voight**
- ***Homecoming* – Cynthia Voight**
- ***Tears of a Tiger* – Sharon Draper**
- ***The Outcasts of 19 Schuyler Place* – e.l. konigsburg**
- ***Absolutely Normal Chaos* – Sharon Creech**
- ***Ruby Holler* – Sharon Creech**
- ***Pictures of Hollis Woods* – Patricia Reilly Giff**
- ***Speak* – Laurie Halse Anderson**
- ***Wintergirls* – Laurie Halse Anderson**
- ***Catalyst* – Laurie Halse Anderson**
- ***The Wednesday Wars* – Gary D. Schmidt**

Please send the titles of your students’ additional favorite young adult novels to me at mask92369@gmail.com. I will compile these, link them to a review or short summary, and publish in a future issue of *eMet*.

Work Cited

Aronson, Marc. "The Challenge and the Glory of Young Adult Literature." *Booklist*. 93.16 (15 Apr. 1997): 1418-19.
Mitchell, Diana. (2003). *Children’s Literature: An Invitation to the World*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Academic Accolades for MCTE's Vice-President!

Kia Jane Richmond, Associate Professor of English at **Northern Michigan University** and Vice President of MCTE, was honored as a 2008-2009 Distinguished Team Service Award recipient, part of the **Academic Service Learning Advisory Board** at NMU. Dr. Richmond incorporates academic service learning projects into her teacher education courses each term. This semester, she has two major projects: One connects students in her Teaching of Writing course via the internet as writing mentors to sixth grade students in



Kim David's Language Art class in Wylie, Texas. The other project, for which Richmond received a \$400 ASL Action Grant, allows students in her Literature for Young Adults course and in her Methods of Teaching English course to research and select texts for suggested use in English teacher **Scott Schwarz's** forthcoming Native American Literature class at **Baraga High School**. Richmond's students are also writing lesson plans on Native American literature for Mr. Schwarz.

Congratulations to our own **Kia Jane Richmond** on both her efforts and on this award!

For more information about Academic Service Learning and how it might enhance your own teaching and students' learning, note the following resources:

■ Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

<http://www.servicelearning.org/what-service-learning>

■ Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning (MJCSL)

<http://www.umich.edu/~mjcsl/>

■ Northern Michigan University's ASL Page

<http://webb.nmu.edu/ASL/index.shtml>

From the MCTE Ning

I have recently submitted our social network for consideration for an **Excellent Affiliate Web Site** award from **NCTE**. If you would like to add any content to the site that would help make our case--smartening up your profile page with an image, starting a new discussion, or responding to some of the student work that has been posted recently--now would be a great time.

While we are on the topic of student work, I highly recommend the unit plans that have been posted: mythology-**Chris Williams**, short stories-**Adam Kennedy** and **Blaine Sullivan**, and *Romeo and Juliet*-**Kelly Boston**. Just search these names or topics in the archive feature and you will find some exceptional work.

<http://mienglishteacher.ning.com/forum/topics/high-school-resources>

Robert Rozema

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

Oakland University Students Participate in MCTE Spring Conference

By Nancy Joseph, Oakland University, joseph@oakland.edu

Professional development is an important part of career growth, especially for new educators. Thirteen secondary education students with English majors and minors recently were involved in such an experience. Early on a Saturday morning -- April 4, 2009-- the future teachers of English traveled to MSU to attend Bright Ideas, the spring conference of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English (MCTE). Under the direction of **Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP)** advisor **Dr. Nancy Joseph**, students were engaged in professional development through a variety of conference sessions on topics ranging from teaching world literature through Google earth and RealE books to designing creative assignments for student writers.

Three Oakland University students were on conference program. **Lori Rowley** participated in "**The Challenges and Successes of Student Teaching: Intern Panel**," presenting a discussion of her student teaching experiences at **Anchor Bay High School** in the Anchor Bay School District. She advised student teachers to be well prepared with the content and to enjoy the interactions with students. Looking back on her internship experiences, Lori explained, "As I reflected on my internship and shared my stories with a group of students who will be student teaching next year, I realized how far I have come as an educator and just how much I have learned in the past year." She enjoyed sharing her experiences as part of the intern panel and added, "I love attending the MCTE conferences because they give me such relevant and useful information about current issues on teaching literature and writing."

Orsola Curcuru and **Elyse Horner** worked with Dr. Joseph to present "**New Literacies: Digital Storytelling and Technology in the Classroom**." This session provided an overview of the Michigan instructional objectives for high school teachers and included suggestions for implementing technology and using online sources. Dr. Joseph introduced the session and explained that new literacies, also known as multiliteracies, require today's high school students to have sophisticated critical thinking and problem solving abilities, extending far beyond the traditional basics of reading and writing. **Elyse Horner**, the next speaker, described her experiences using technology in her student teaching at **Brandon High School** in Ortonville, noting that her skill with instructional tools such as the document camera and the walk & talk white board has developed. She explained that her presentation at the MCTE conference was a valuable opportunity to become involved in professional development. "I also learned about other types of technology and can't wait to use what I learned in the classroom," she commented.



Nancy Joseph, Elyse Horner, and Orsola Curcuru review plans for their presentations.

As the keynote speaker in the new literacies session, Orsola Curcuru presented a well received explanation of digital storytelling. She used this innovative instructional strategy with her seventh grade classes from **Seneca Middle School** in Chippewa Valley to help students develop their literacy skills. She commented, "I feel that it is vital for new teachers to integrate technology into the classroom because it has become a necessary life skill for the working world. My students need to adapt to growing technological advances, and I can encourage them to develop these skills through the assignments I create." Orsola added that she valued the opportunity to participate in the conference and is looking forward to speaking at MCTE in the future as new technologies surface.

Attending the MCTE conference also was a valuable experience for STEP students who are scheduled to student teach this fall. **Angie Walentovic** attended "**Code-Switching and African American Vernacular English in the English Class**" and shared information with fellow students in a recent session of ENG398, a course taken by English majors and minors prior to the internship. Angie explained that the research on American dialects urges teachers to acknowledge linguistic and cultural diversity while encouraging students to master Standard American English. Students discovered that this information complemented their course readings and discussions. Other students shared details from the conference sessions they attended: **Amy Crecelius** reviewed ideas for embedding grammar instruction into literature study, while **Gwyn Reece** and **Kayla McCabe** discussed strategies for using literature circles in the secondary classroom.

The following STEP students also attended the MCTE conference: **Mike Becker, Ashley Curran, Lia Elena DeRubeis, Lauren Moore, Elizabeth Treblin, and David Wyatt.**

The National Day on Writing

The National Gallery of Writing



How will you spend your summer vacation? Consider writing for NCTE

October 20, 2009 is NCTE's **National Day on Writing** <http://www.ncte.org/action/dayonwriting> but you don't have to wait until then to do some writing of your own. Spend your summer writing for NCTE. The organization offers a variety of publishing opportunities from books to journal articles, to lesson plans. No time for an extended writing project this summer? Submit 150 words describing "how you have altered, adjusted, or shifted your habits and expectations—since the time you began teaching" to thenandnow@ncte.org.

- from NCTE Standing Committee on Affiliates Newsletter

Welcome to
read·write·think
International Reading Association NCTE

*Summer Resources
for Students*

Explore <http://www.readwritethink.org/beyondtheclassroom/summer/> for activities and resources to help children and teens explore reading and writing after school, during vacation, or all summer long. These materials are brought to you by the literacy experts at **ReadWriteThink**.

**Learning Beyond
THE CLASSROOM**

Reading Rockets offers summer reading guidance

Reading Rockets is a national multimedia project offering information and resources on how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how caring adults can help. Check out the summer reading resources for teachers and parents <http://www.readingrockets.org/calendar/summer#parent>

The Reading Rockets project is comprised of PBS television programs, available on videotape and DVD; online services, including the web sites [ReadingRockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org) and [ColorinColorado.org](http://www.colorincolorado.org); and professional development opportunities. Reading Rockets is an educational initiative of **WETA**, the flagship public television and radio station in the nation's capital, and is funded by a major grant from the **U.S. Department of Education**, Office of Special Education Programs.

Michigan Conference on English Education (MCEE) Update

By Allen Webb, Western Michigan University, allen.webb@wmich.edu



While professors of English education in Michigan have worked closely together for many years supporting MCTE and related activities and conferences, since 2008 this group has created a formal organization, the **Michigan Conference on English Education** (MCEE), one of three state affiliates of the national **Conference on English Education** (CEE).

Professors involved in the preparation of future language arts teachers and in graduate and professional development of current language arts teachers are found at many universities in Michigan including **Adrian, Alma, Albion, Aquinas, Calvin, Finlandia, and Hillsdale** colleges and **Central, Detroit, Eastern, Ferris, Grand Valley, Lake Superior, Madonna, Michigan Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint, Michigan State, Michigan Tech, Northern, Oakland, Spring Arbor, Saginaw Valley, Wayne, Western** universities – all of these institutions are represented in the organization.

These professors, most of them former classroom teachers, have a role to play in supporting high quality language arts teaching K-12.

MCEE allows English education professors to improve the preparation of language arts teachers, better support the activities of MCTE, communicate about language arts issues at the state level, and organize in support of language arts teachers in Michigan. The group has a list serve and a website at www.michigancee.org/ and welcomes new members.

A recent initiative has been to advocate for a thoughtful and balanced approach to the integration of the revised Michigan Language Arts Standards and Content Expectations that supports teacher decision-making at the classroom level, see <http://mienglishstandards.wikispaces.com/>

At a day-long retreat on the MSU campus in February, MCEE members shared ideas and strategies for how to develop theoretically informed language-arts teaching and how to foster language arts teachers as “public intellectuals” respected for their professionalism and able to advocate for high quality teaching and learning.

Doug Baker (EMU) and **Nancy Joseph** (Oakland) were elected president and vice-president of the organization in April.



Publications New and Best-Selling

Have you read these? Find these and more <http://www1.ncte.org/store/books>

Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom-Author(s): ***Katie Wood Ray***

Katie Wood Ray explains in practical terms the theoretical underpinnings of how elementary and middle school students learn to write from their reading. **Level:** *Elementary*

Using the Writer's Notebook in Grades 3-8: A Teacher's Guide-Author(s): ***Janet L. Elliott***

Janet Elliott provides practical ideas, assignments, and examples of student writing. This book offers a vision of what is possible for young writers—both in writing across the curriculum and in writing workshop. **Level(s):** *Elementary, Middle*

Writing about Literature, 2nd ed., Revised and Updated-Author(s): ***Elizabeth A. Kahn, Carolyn Calhoun Walter, Larry R. Johannessen***

This book is intended to help middle and secondary school English language arts teachers integrate literature study and composition instruction. **Level:** *Secondary*

Grammar and the Teaching of Writing: Limits and Possibilities-Author(s): ***Rei R. Noguchi***

For many students, Noguchi believes, formal study of grammar seems far removed from the daily use of language. He believes that grammar can help students—but only with style, not with content or organization—and he suggests presenting students with a "writer's grammar" that specifically addresses the problems that crop up most often or those that society deems most serious.

Level(s): *Middle, Secondary, College*

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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.

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