

# inter★stela



the online professional newsletter of the  
SASKATCHEWAN TEACHERS OF ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS

MAY 2004

*O! this learning, what a thing it is.*  
William Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew

In this issue...



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# from the editor

What a thing, indeed! I have little doubt that William Shakespeare intended to convey both the beauty and the blight inherent in the seeds and fruits of learning. And for our part, we make a profession of it! This online publication will seek to provide a stomping ground for both aspects of the profession, through the inclusion of editorials, reviews, anecdotes, resources, and other professionally relevant information.

Let me be the first to welcome you to the new online version of the Saskatchewan Teachers of English Language Arts professional newsletter, *inter★stela*. Let me also invite you to truly make it your own, as it is my firm belief that it will not wholly belong to you until you appear in and amongst its pages. In essence, it is hoped that eventually every member of STELA will be a contributing member of this newsletter. Passionate pedagogy is highly contagious and it is one virus that this newsletter will hope to accelerate to the status of outbreak in Saskatchewan's ELA classrooms!

As for the name of the newsletter, *inter★stela*, it is intended to convey a spirit of interaction and collaboration among teaching colleagues, while also marking the newsletter's new life on the internet. It is also representative of the reality that while we may literally stand alone in front of our students, we are never alone in a more figurative sense. That is to say, the pursuit of personal success in teaching and learning, for both ourselves and with our students, stitches us into a much larger, indeed much older and further reaching, quilt of practice. You are welcome—the coffee is already on—to contribute a patch to this quilt as we begin to let this newsletter stand as our bee. Enjoy.

Ryan Land  
Newsletter Editor



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# from the president

Spring has been a busy season for the STELA executive.

- Membership renewals are continuing to arrive. Please remind your colleagues to purchase or renew their STELA memberships.
- Ryan has spent many hours preparing our first issue of *inter.stela* – our online newsletter. Thank you, as well, to the several people who contributed to the newsletter.
- The new website is nearly complete, and we're hoping that it will meet the needs of our members. Please provide feedback so that we can make improvements where necessary. In particular, we would love to receive suggestions for links to teaching resources. We all have a favourite site, so why not share it with our colleagues?
- Thank you to the teacher volunteers for the mentorship program. We will advertise the program to beginning teachers in the fall, and our mentorship program coordinator will match beginning and experienced teachers. We would love to have more volunteers, as well!
- The STELA executive passed a motion to fund a youth participant for the Festival of Words workshop for young writers.
- Thank you for the many *Golden Taffy* submissions. They have been forwarded to the judges.
- Conference 2005 will be in Saskatoon. Details will follow – please check the website for updates.

Thank you for your involvement in STELA. Each contribution makes us a more effective organization for you and your peers. Best wishes for the remainder of the school year. I hope you have a restful and enjoyable summer vacation.

Lynn Howse, President  
May 2004

# tribute

## A Tribute to Mabel Fleming

*Wendy Barker*

In December, STELA lost a dear friend and colleague of many years. Mabel Fleming passed away in Regina of bone cancer, and she will be sadly missed. Mabel served on the STELA Executive for many years, as Golden Taffy Coordinator and STELA Treasurer. She was faithful, dedicated and enthusiastic; her love of teaching and of our English Council was well known. Mabel was a recipient of the Joseph Duffy Memorial Award, and at our conference in October, she was again recognised along with other previous Joseph Duffy recipients, and I know that meant a great deal to her.

Mabel was born in Oshawa, Ontario to John and Marie Archer. She attended Queen's and Emmanuel College in Toronto, and moved to Saskatchewan in 1948 as an ordained United Church minister. She served in the John Wesley district where she met Robert Alexander Fleming. They were married in 1950 and subsequently raised a family of three: Robert, Peter and Susan.

Her love of English Literature attracted Mabel to a career change, and in 1959, Mabel obtained her teaching degree and taught high school English and History for the best part of forty years. During this time, she and Bob were both active with the CCF (NDP) and church organisations. Mabel lived in Melville for six years and in Regina for nine years after her husband's death, She then returned to the farm at Kelliher, where she lived for the rest of her life, keeping actively involved in STELA affairs and raising her twin grandsons whom she adopted in 1994.

Mabel was a very special person, full of energy and enthusiasm for life. She was my friend and colleague for over twenty years and she is truly missed.

# golden taffy

## A Word from the Golden Taffy Editor

Dennis Nesseth

To everyone that has contributed to this year's edition of *Golden Taffy*: Congratulations! Growing in our Saskatchewan schools, communities, towns, and cities, is some fine talent. What a great diversity of writing.

As you glance through the first pages of this book, you will see some very ambitious elementary aged writers. To see the world through their eyes is truly wonderful. Middle years authors' vibrant personalities are splashed on the next pages of the book. The energy in their stories and poems is palpable. In the final pages, our senior writers perceive the world to be a little more complex in its joys and mysteries. Intrigued, they have invited us along as they explore this beautiful, ironic, and sometimes frightening world. I want to thank everyone who submitted work this year. You have done something courageous and important in offering to share your writing with the world.

We all need teachers, so I want to thank all teachers who work closely with their students to help them get their writing to where it needs to be. Thanks, too, for keeping our organization and publication alive through your membership fees. You serve our young writers well.

Thanks also go to those who have served as judges for the various categories of writing and to everyone who has contributed to the assembly of this year's publication. Special acknowledgements go to Steven Michael Berzensky and Yann Martel who served as judges for the senior contests.

A final message for our young Saskatchewan writers: Keep writing and submitting to publications such as *Golden Taffy*. I know that among you are authors who will take up and continue the important work that writers like Yann Martel and Steven Michael Berzensky do for our world. Hold on to your pens and use them well.

# golden taffy winners

SENIOR SHORT STORY CONTEST WINNER

## Girls Have it Easier

Kristine Montgomery, Morse School

Teacher: Rob Geiger

"Kate'll be here at seven to pick us up for the game," Kevin told his mom as he finished washing dishes and folded the towel neatly beside the sink, "I'll be downstairs getting ready, all right?"

"Sure," his mom called as he hurried down the stairs. She glanced at the clock, it was already 5:30, he'd have to hurry if he wanted to be ready in time.

Twenty minutes later, as Kevin stepped out of the bathroom after having a shower, his best friend Mike showed up with a big duffel bag full of clothes under his arm. Soon the two boys were busy debating which pair of pants Kevin should wear if he planned to wear his white cutoff t-shirt. His mom put her two cents in on the issue, saying the blue pair she'd bought him for Christmas were the least likely to rib if he ever had to sit down. The boys rolled their eyes and sent her out of the room for being old-fashioned. The pants weren't *that* tight! They continued getting ready, and soon the house was filled with the hum of hair dryers and the scent of hair gel as they painstakingly styled each other's hair.

"Girls have it so much easier," Mike complained as he tried in vain to straighten out the cowlick on Kevin's forehead.

"Yeah, totally. And, like, how do they expect us to understand them when they are just so frustrating?" Kevin commiserated.

"I can't believe Tara said she didn't like my shirt. Do you think she means that she doesn't like the way it looks on me, or just the shirt in general? Or is it me she doesn't like? I wish she'd just say what she means."

"Katie frustrates me so much some days, I don't think she ever even notices when I'm upset with her!" Kevin interrupted.

"Oh, I know! Isn't that annoying? And then there's Cary. What do you think I should do about her? I think I do like her, but I don't know if she likes me. I mean she sits with me in Math and stuff, but that could be just because Mark sits across from me.

I could, like, maybe ask something about Mark and see what she says. But then what if she says she does like him? Or what if she thinks that when I ask her I mean that he likes her?" Mark said in exactly one breath.

"What if I ask her?" Kevin asked, and on the conversation went, until Mark suddenly noticed they only had 15 minutes until Katie was supposed to arrive.

"Oh my gosh!" shrieked Kevin as he hurriedly changed pants one last time. They both crowded in front of the mirror for one last quick check of everything possible to check.

"You look great," Mark told Kevin as they headed for the stairs.

"I think this shirt makes me look older," Kevin agreed. Twenty-five minutes later they sat in the kitchen waiting for Katie.

"I can't believe she's late again. I, like, rushed to get ready and then she doesn't even show up on time!" Kevin whined.

"I still think you should put more clothes on, you're going to a hockey game where it'll be cold. I don't think that shirt is going to be warm enough, it barely covers your shoulders," Kevin's mom told him.

"Mom, I'll be fine, see I'm taking a jacket," he told her tersely. Katie finally pulled into the yard, beer in hand.

"Be careful!" Kevin's mom called as they went to the door.

"Hey Kev, which shoes do I wear, the black leather ones with the laces or the black leather slip-ons?" Mark asked.

"Umm, slip-ons tonight. They work with the shirt you have on." And with that they headed out the door to Katie's waiting pickup.

"Hey," she said as they opened the door, "sorry I'm late, we had to stop to get beer. You can move some of that off the seat if you want." She motioned to the shotgun, shells, and beer caps that littered the seat beside her. The boys giggled and gingerly sat down amongst the clutter. Pulling out of Kevin's yard Katie gunned the engine and tore off down the gravel road. At the next intersection she e-braked around the corner towards another friend's house. There, two more girls piled into the back and they urged her to stop at the gravel pit for a while before they went to the game. They wanted proof that her truck really had all the power she said it did.

"That all right with you guys?" she asked as she turned down the road that led to the pit.

"Umm, well..." Mark looked at Kevin and they silently discussed it. Then Mark shrugged, "Okay fine, whatever, but we like, have to be at the game for when they skate out because I want to hear the song."

"Whatever. We will be." Katie's truck roared over the railroad tracks as they crossed them and one of the girls handed Kevin a beer bottle to throw out the window.

After tearing up the gravel pits for a while, the guys convinced the girls to head back to town for the game. They got there just as the first period was starting and the guys hurried inside to see who was already there. The girls hung back for a beer and a smoke before making their entrance.

Inside, the guys hurriedly discussed the trip, and how frustrating it was when Katie didn't listen, before joining a larger group of friends to discuss the same thing.

The girls walked in a few minutes later and, walking right past the guys, went to the far end of the rink beside the player's bench, to watch the girls on the ice as they fought for control of the puck. There they joined an already loud group in yelling insults at the referee, the opposing players, and other fans.

Mark and Kevin decided to sit inside where it was warmer and they wouldn't get hit with the puck if they weren't paying attention. They bought hot chocolate, and spent the period trying to figure out what the referee was calling each time the whistle blew. When the girls came back inside, they peppered them with questions about the game until finally the girls went back outside for another beer.

For the rest of the game the girls again resumed their position by the boards, while the guys wandered in and out depending on how cold they were. After the game, the girls stood waiting for the guys to finish chatting and giggling with their friends so they could go home.

"Cripes, they never shut up!" Katie muttered, as they waited by the door.

"Just wait! I have to use the bathroom," Mark said and Kevin followed. Ten minutes later, when they came back, the frustrated girls had already gone to start the truck.

After an uneventful drive home, the guys said their good-byes and went inside to Kevin's room to discuss the night in detail. The girls drove around a while before going home for a beer and some ravioli. Another typical teenage night ended with the girls dozing off on separate couches in Katie's living room, and the guys curled up on Kevin's futon after deciding one last time that girls have it so much easier.

*SENIOR POETRY CONTEST WINNER*

*Latvia*

*Lauren Kresowaty, Turtleford High School*

*Teacher: Shauna Cheriyan*

*Latvia was  
the country of my tenth year*

*culture shock: weird milk,  
trams, pay toilets,  
history*

*castles, palaces,  
cathedrals,  
pagan rocks and ancient springs*

*Latvia was  
school by the sea  
gym class on the beach  
salt and sand always in my hair  
pines like telephone poles  
standing on the dunes*

*the building was an old summer house;  
pillars, balconies, French doors,  
peach and cream stucco,  
crumbling at the edges  
sticky linoleum and broken heaters  
ants*

*Latvia was  
where I met my first crush  
a suave little French boy  
I know he liked me back,  
he threw a worm at me  
Damn, the French are romantic*

*Latvia was  
where I learned the word, "corrupt"  
a country of worry,  
devoid of trust.*

*Latvia was  
crowded trains into the city  
standing; crammed in with the smells: B.O.,  
bad breath, cigarettes,  
cheap vodka,  
fish*

Latvia was  
Old Town  
brightly coloured buildings  
stacked against each other like books on a shelf  
cobblestone streets,  
cellists on the corners.  
avenues lined with trees,  
yellow leaves on black asphalt

church steeples breaking through the skyline,  
stabbing at the Heavens.

the Opera House  
white pillars and velvet curtains  
red plushy seats  
everything is edged with gold  
and even from high up you can see the stage  
and count the dancers' ribs.

Latvia was  
coming home from school in the summer  
waiting at Dzintari station,  
cracked pavement and singing rails  
great green trains opening their doors like jaws  
swallowing whole crowds of people gathered on the platform

Latvia was  
Midsummer Night  
tramping through the misty fields  
wearing a crown of daisies on my head  
a woman in a black dress plays a violin  
leading us in a straggling procession among the haunted trees  
we all sing,  
"Ligo, Ligo,"  
that night I sleep on a bed of straw.

Latvia is  
growth and decay  
Latvia is  
beauty and poverty, celebration and heavy hearts.  
Latvia is  
surviving.

Latvia is  
a country reborn.  
Latvia is  
Alive in me.

# from thistledown press

## The Erosion of Erudition

Denis L.J. Dubé, former English teacher

Education Sales, Thistledown Press

Over the years teaching and teachers have been vilified, glorified, chastised, and sometimes, rewarded. What is it about our profession that evokes such dichotomous descriptors? Is it the fact that everyone remembers teachers they may have had who have fit one or more of the noted descriptions? Or is it the fact that there is the belief that anyone can teach? Or is it that if you can't do something else, you teach? We have all heard of that old adage, haven't we? In particular, English teachers have become that well known dumping ground of education - anyone can teach English! So, we get teachers from a variety of other subject areas teaching English, and consequently they become bogged down with a subject they can barely grasp, much less teach someone else to grasp! How has all of this emerged? And why? What has education come to when the premier subject in school has become a dumping ground, and when students are not receiving the very best of instruction they should be entitled to in a subject so important for success in our modern world?

Communicating effectively, eloquently, and efficiently are so essential for success in our burgeoning competitive world. Marketing and promotion have rapidly become the two key areas of growth in this world. Being able to explain, describe, outline, encapsulate, and do it convincingly has become one of the major requisites for success. Why then has education seen fit to curtail much of this genre? Certainly it is still offered as part of the curriculum and it is still part of the options courses in Senior High, yet it is no longer compulsory. All too often those untrained in the fine art of communicating forget that reading and reading a great deal is a necessary part of becoming a great communicator. How can you possibly be erudite without first being well read? There are no 'canned' answers in books about this! You need to learn about it and do it yourself to achieve the level of competence so necessary to become successful at it. I am sorry teachers of English, but this is a truism. You need to read and read voraciously to become a master of your craft. You cannot let others do it for you!

No one ever said our job was easy! Oh yes, perhaps those people who do not understand or care to understand what needs to be done to become a true teacher of English! English is communicating, reading, listening and viewing. I will never forget one of my mentors, a teacher I had on staff who was a true English teacher. She had taught forty-three years, and yet when she came back to teach part time after being retired, she took home all of the books that the students might want to read in her upcoming senior English class so she would be current and up to date with their course's requirements! She read them all! I have never forgotten that and have tried to emulate her example ever since.

We cannot be an example of erudition without being erudite ourselves. We need to demonstrate scholarly activity and characteristics daily! Our students need to see it in action and then perhaps they will want to emulate our role modeling.

I have found that, all too often, teachers are more prone to use what is comfortable for them, and do not want to break the mold and try something new. Heavens, they may have to read something new if they did! Why are so many teachers using material - that may very well be on the recommended list but it has been there for decades - when there are so many more good contemporary materials available, materials that students can identify with and don't find boring? All of this takes time and many people say that their time is precious and they don't have enough time to prepare their lessons, correct the assignments, much less read! I am sorry, but reading is a major part of our duties, or used to be and should continue to be if we wish to teach our young people to be erudite. Mental discipline cannot be pre-packaged. It needs to be fostered, cared for, and continuously encouraged. But, this is another topic, perhaps for another day.

Perhaps we as English teachers are as much to blame for this predicament as those who helped promote it. More so, perhaps, by not doing enough at the time and being complacent in our knowledge that we, at least, were doing our jobs.

STELA is a strong voice in our profession. Keep it that way. Use its stage to promote and encourage good reading, good writing, good listening, and good communicating skills. Without these skills we become mired in mediocrity.

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# it worked for me

I read in a book that there are 92 different words in the word "planets". So, to enhance vocabulary and get students "excited" about language, I assigned that task to them. They were to find the 92 words, as well as any more, in "planets". At the end, we played a form of Bingo to see who found the most words. There were bonus prizes for any who found more. They enjoyed this and really got into this activity. I was amazed at how excited and proud they were when they found new words.

*Melissa Meadows, Assiniboia Composite High*

In order for me to have a few minutes at the beginning of class to take attendance and get students working as soon as they arrive in class, I created "Word of the Day". I write a word on the board, students independently figure out the pronunciation of the word, define the word and then use it in a sentence. After twelve days I have students write a paragraph using at least ten of the words to hand in for marking. I subscribed to "word of the day" at [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) to get new words each day. In a brave moment, I also assigned each student to choose a word of the day to present and correct with the class. It worked better than I thought it might.

*Melanie Delorme, Assiniboia Composite High*

This year I have had a lot of fun with Shakespeare, in large part to curtains from value village and crowns from the Dollar Store. Instead of each student just reading a character's lines, we have been dressing up in homemade capes and plastic swords and doing more acting of the play as we read through it. I find that this has increased interest, (and, yes, sometimes silliness) in the play. I've also found that giving a part to the student who is most likely to be disruptive, gives him/her a channel for that extra energy!

*Shauna Cheriyan, Turtleford School*

My students complete reading projects once per term. Marking four class sets at once is a cumbersome task. In order to lighten my load, I allow each of my students to pick a submission date - limiting the number of projects per class to three per day. The students have some control over their deadlines, and I have a maximum of twelve projects to mark at a time. Quite often, students complete their work early in the term, so my marking load (and the student workload) is much lighter around report card deadlines.

*Lynn Howse, Campbell Collegiate*

# from the field

## Integrating the Multiple Intelligences in Middle Years ELA

*Chris Beingessner, Middle Years Teacher*

Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) is frequently documented and commonly accepted as a key element of sound pedagogy. In brief, Gardner believes that a person has not only one area of intelligence, but nine. Or, as I tell my students, every person is smart in different ways. This year, with the support of a colleague, I have fully embraced this theory in my ELA classroom, and empowered students in ways I never thought possible.

If teachers incorporate the multiple intelligences into daily lesson and unit planning, they will have a class that experiences success. However, what I have found truly empowers students is to not only use this theory myself, but to share it with my students and have them identify their own personal strengths and weaknesses. Then, I teach incorporating all intelligences, and continue to be very explicit about what I am doing, and why. The key here is transparency – my class knows which intelligences we will be covering during a given lesson. Before a lesson starts, they know which parts of the lesson they will find easy, which they may find challenging, and which classmates they can turn to if they need help. Posted at the back of the room is a chart showing where each student scored on each of the intelligences.

For some of my students, this is the first time they have been recognized as “smart” – they are usually the ones who score low in the traditionally emphasized mathematical/logical and verbal/linguistic intelligences. What they have never been shown is that they have high scores in other areas.

English Language Arts traditionally focuses only on the verbal/linguistic intelligence. However, our curriculum makes it easy – and even an expectation – to include other intelligences. For example, graphic organizers will help students with high logical/mathematical or visual/spatial intelligences. Any sort of movement incorporated into the class will aid your students with bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence. Using music or poetry as a text will ease the learning for students with a high musical/rhythmic intelligence. Students with a high intrapersonal intelligence will excel writing journals or any other type of self-reflection. Literature circles are good for students with a high interpersonal intelligence. Students whose main intelligence is naturalist will enjoy spending time outside and studying texts to do with nature. Those who have a high existential intelligence will excel at discussing characters, their actions, and how this relates to life in general. This list is far from exhaustive, but I should give you ideas of how I include the MI in my ELA classroom.

When unit planning, the goal is to include all intelligences on a regular basis. There is plenty of overlap - one lesson could easily cover the verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existentialist intelligences.

Even though I had previously recognized the successes my students had experienced when I used this method, the other day I realized exactly how empowering incorporating MI could be. In my class is a young man who is a fantastic hockey player. He scores very high in the bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence. He scores low in all other intelligences. Needless to say, he has struggled in school, disliked school, and his prior report cards have been below average.

We are currently writing non-fiction stories, and the students were brainstorming significant and memorable moments in their lives. After discussing potential topics with a partner, I asked for volunteers to share with the whole class. The students' ideas were what I expected - a vacation, a practical joke at school, a paintball game. Then my hockey player put up his hand: "Mine is this year, when I learned for the first time that I wasn't dumb. Everybody is smart in different areas. Bodily/kinaesthetic stuff is really easy to me, but not for everyone. Jodie is smart when it comes to logical/mathematical activities, but not as smart in other areas." As my heart melted, he continued to explain that no one has all high scores or all low scores; we are all good at some things and have to work harder at others. What a moment.



## STELA CONFERENCE

- ★ Spring 2005, Saskatoon
- ★ DATE, VENUE, and THEME to be announced in August (suggestions welcome)
- ★ Hosted by Saskatoon Catholic High Schools
- ★ Plan to attend...save those conference and travel \$'s
- ★ Contact [MMcGarity@scs.sk.ca](mailto:MMcGarity@scs.sk.ca) for more information

## Core of Discovery: Engaging Voices and Visions

Northwest Regional NCTE  
Language Arts Conference  
Lewiston, Idaho, March 16-19, 2005

### Introduction

Interested educators, K-college, are invited to submit session proposals for the NCTE Northwest Regional Conference hosted by the InLand Northwest Council of Teachers of English. The Program Committee will review proposals with particular attention to relevance, clarity, and appeal to teachers. In selecting presenters, the committee will try to achieve an overall program balance in terms of range of topics for designated strands and all grades, K-college. We will also consider the professional and geographic distribution of the participants. The Council encourages broad participation and a variety of viewpoints.

### Program Strands/Themes

Overall conference themes touch on core of discovery, learning, as the opportunity to engage the voices in our practice, in our curriculum, and the visions for English/Language Arts as the field re-visions itself for the new century. Concurrent session strands include:

- *Writing the West*: regional writers, especially voices and visions that flesh out our understanding of the West
- *Trickster: Coyote in the classroom*: innovative teaching ideas; exciting student work
- *Grassroots Activism*: professional activism at local, state, and national levels; methods and materials that promote social justice; service learning
- *Settlers and Unsettlers*: dominant, alternative, and resistant literacies

### Guidelines

Please use the proposal form\*, or photocopies of it, and provide all information requested. Please print clearly and attach word-processed presentation abstract. Request AV equipment only if essential to the presentation. Presenters who bring their own AV, computer, or TV equipment are welcome to do so.

The program proposal will not be returned; proposers should retain a copy. Please submit by November 10, 2004. Proposers will be notified of committee decisions as soon as possible after January 1, 2005.

As a professional, non-profit organization, the National Council of Teachers of English and its affiliates cannot reimburse program participants for expenses associated with the conference, including materials, travel expenses, and registration. All presenters are expected to register for the conference.

\* If you are interested in submitting a proposal, please request the form from Ryan Land ([rland@sasktel.net](mailto:rland@sasktel.net)).

# on the lighter side

Four high school boys afflicted with spring fever skipped morning classes. After lunch they reported to the teacher that they had a flat tire. Much to their relief she smiled and said: "Well, you missed a test today so take seats apart from one another and take out a piece of paper." Still smiling, she waited for them to sit down. Then she said: "First question: Which tire was flat?"

**Teacher:** Herman, name two pronouns.

**Pupil:** Who, me?

**Teacher:** Correct!

A fifth grader looked downcast, so her teacher asked. "What's the problem Carol? I hope it's not homework again."

"Well, uh, yes, it is," replied Carol. "I was stupid and made my homework paper into a paper airplane."

"Carol, you're right, that wasn't a very bright thing to do," said the teacher, "but this once I'll let you just unfold the paper and hand it in."

"Oh, but that won't work," said Carol, looking even sadder. "You see, the plane was hijacked."

**Teacher:** Where is your pencil, Harmon?

**Pupil:** I ain't got none.

**Teacher:** How many times have I told you not to say that, Harmon? Now listen: I do not have a pencil. You do not have a pencil. They do not have a pencil. Now, do you understand?

**Pupil:** Not really. What happened to all the pencils?

"Some drink at the fountain of knowledge...others just gargle."

- unknown

In a grammar lesson in eighth grade Mrs. O'Neill said, "Paul, give me a sentence with a direct object."

Paul replied. "Everyone thinks you are the best teacher in the school."

"Thank you, Paul," responded Mrs. O'Neill, "but what is the object?"

"To get the best mark possible," said Paul.

# Lesson plans

## ELA A10: The Unknown

Kyla Moffatt

Lesson/Content ID: Crime Scene Investigation

**Materials:** Crime Scene supplies – “chalk” outline of victim, weapon, etc.  
Copies of the handout “Crime Reporting”  
“Witness” Statements – as a handout or verbal (from you or someone else)

### Introductory Activities / Prerequisite Learnings:

- This can be used as a lead in to the Unknown unit, or as part of an ongoing mystery/suspense segment. However incorporated, the students should have expressed some interest in this type of activity, and should have some background knowledge about crime reporting (I did this activity after we had been studying the Welwyn Massacre/John Morrison murder case, 1900 – various articles in the Leader Post and Moosomin World-Spectator).

### Set:

- Before class, set up your crime scene. It's very effective if you can get Police Line tape or Caution tape to put across your door or around the crime scene, but use what you have!
- Have students come into the room and sit down – being careful not to disturb the scene of the crime.
- Tell students “As you can plainly see, a crime has been committed in our classroom. Police have asked for our help in solving this crime.”

### Development:

- Give each student a handout, and have them remember to use the Who What When Where Why How format to ensure they have enough information.
- Have students, in small groups, view the crime scene. Other students can be observing from a distance, checking for evidence, or getting witness statements!
- After all students have looked at the crime scene, have them fill in their sheet. Remind them to be as specific as possible, and NOT to make guesses. Use only facts!
- After they have finished, discuss what has happened. Were students correct in their investigating? Did they find the “clues” they were supposed to find? Did they cover the 5W and H questions in their investigating/reporting?

### Closure:

- Have students write an Exit Slip about the activity, and what impact it had on them.

### Adaptations/ Hints:

- I used artifacts (old letters, a pencil, a scroll, old books about Elvis, an old milk bottle and canning jar, a book about Beothuk Indians (who are now extinct) a VHS tape, a cassette tape, a wooden toy truck, a cloth diaper and glass baby bottle, etc.) to stage the crime scene, and did "chalk outline" of all the things (use butcher block paper or masking tape on the floor). In the middle of the Crime Scene I placed an open thesaurus with the word CULTURE highlighted.
- The Witness was me, and I described how a black-cloaked figure came and left these things. He wouldn't tell me his name or why he was doing this, but he did have a clock around his neck... you get the picture.
- Of course, the victim is culture/technology, and the suspect was Father Time. We used the crime scene as a jumping point for discussion about how technology has made a lot of things into "artifacts"- such as the pencil, letters, etc. This was the beginning of our Chrysalids novel study, so the tie-in was perfect!
- I also used the Crime Scene as a Creative Writing prompt for another class, and they really liked it!
- Details of the handout are listed below:

### *The Element of Crime Reporting*

In writing a crime report, law officials must include the following things. Please use the space provided to respond to the crime scene in the classroom.

1. The "Elements of the Crime" (evidence) – it must be evident that something against the law has been done.
2. A Description of the Crime Scene – the place in which a crime took place must be described using words. Draw a brief diagram to strengthen your description.
3. Statements by Witnesses – what has been said by people who saw what happened and their descriptions of the people involved must be written.
4. A Summary of the Case – must tell a story of what happened. Must be in chronological order (the order in which the events happened).
5. The Purpose of the Report - To Tell Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How a Crime Happened (A crime report is written mostly in nouns and verbs. It is short and to the point. A crime report is totally factual and does not speculate or make guesses about what happened – it only states the facts).

## ELA B10: Macbeth

### *Outta Ray's Head*

#### Macbeth Activity Using Alanis Morissette's "Wake Up"

**Length of Activity:** 20-25 minutes

**Materials Needed:** Song-"Wake up" by Alanis Morissette; Copies of song lyrics; Copies of Macbeth

**Context:** This activity should follow a reading and discussion of Act I, Scene 7 of Macbeth in which Macbeth expresses his indecisiveness about killing Duncan and Lady Macbeth berates him regarding his indecision.

**Objective:** Students will be able to write statements from Lady Macbeth's viewpoint that express her attitude toward Macbeth and reveal his ambivalence about committing the murder of Duncan.

#### **Sequence of Activities:**

1. Pass out lyrics to Alanis Morissette's "Wake up" from her album *Jagged Little Pill*. As you pass these out, remind students of Act I, Scene 7 and the attitudes of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.
2. Play "Wake up."
3. Ask the following questions:
  - a) What is the speaker's attitude in this song?
  - b) Does this seem to be more like Macbeth's or Lady Macbeth's viewpoint? Refer them to the first three lines that are starred-- what is the speaker expressing in these lines about the person to whom she is referring?
4. Remind students of the cliché, "have your cake, and eat it, too." Put students in groups of 3-4 and tell them to rewrite the lines that are starred as if Lady Macbeth is speaking them to Macbeth. Remind them to consider Macbeth's state of mind at this point in the play and what Lady Macbeth's attitude is toward him. (10 minutes is usually sufficient to accomplish this)
5. Have students share their lines with the class.

For the lyrics, student samples, and more outstanding ELA lesson plans, visit:

<http://home.cogeco.ca/~raysr3>

## A Review of June Edwards' Opposing Censorship in the Public Schools

Shane Small

June Edwards provides a thorough argument for teachers in the battle against censorship in the book *Opposing Censorship in the Public Schools*. Certainly, she is promoting the elimination of censorship in public schools; however, she is persuasive in her attention to both sides of the issue. For every point she discusses, she presents the case of the objectors before following up with counterarguments to support her opposition to them. Her argumentative technique provides a useful resource for teachers in bringing up possible objections they will encounter and subsequently offering them possible solutions.

Primarily, the book deals with the protests of the "religious right" groups in America. This group claims that it should have the power to approve any book used in public schools. They demonstrate Edwards's definition of censorship: "an issue of control, of power over what others will or will not have the opportunity to experience" (24). Many of their arguments are based on the word of the Bible. She denounces their position by well-researched critiques of all of their objections from language to religion to imagination and fantasy. Perhaps, more important for Canadian teachers, she also deals extensively with objections made by parents.

The book can be broken down into three main parts. First, she addresses general issues within censorship. From there, she addresses these issues with specific reference to selected young adult literature. All of the literature she discusses from *The Catcher in the Rye* to *To Kill A Mockingbird*, can be found on the evergreen curriculum and are popular in high schools of Saskatchewan.

Concluding the book, Edwards offers many useful suggestions for preventing and responding to challenges of censorship. She stresses the necessity for understanding rationale in teaching literature, and defending positions diplomatically. Even if one is convinced of his/her justification for teaching a book, the sincerity of a parent must never be doubted, and always an alternative read should be offered.

Although the book is strongly centred towards American teachers, particularly in the attention to the Religious Right and the explanation of laws, it is a practical resource for anyone concerned with issues in censorship. Not only is the argument soundly supported with selected literature relevant to teachers in Saskatchewan, it suggests protests one may not have considered, but must be prepared to face in defending the use of controversial books in the classroom.

Edwards, June. *Opposing Censorship in the Public Schools*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998.

# A Review of John McWhorter's *Doing Our Own Thing: The Degradation of Language and Music and Why We Should, Like, Care*

Paul Park

According to John McWhorter's book *Doing Our Own Thing*, English ain't what it used to be. He argues that this is quite distinct from the traditional lament that is really just a resistance to change. Rather, he argues that our language is, in fact, declining in that the casual is winning out over the formal. This development, he argues, has damaged North Americans' ability to write, read, analyze, argue, and imagine. "Our increasing alienation from 'written language,'" he declares, "signals a gutting of our intellectual powers, our self-regard as a nation, and thus our very substance as a people."

His biggest lament is that North American English speakers have lost their love for their own language. Graceful, well-crafted language is both passé and suspicious. The unfortunate results are crude, casual speeches and dense, academic prose. These are symptoms of a culture that does not feel it is necessary to speak or write with clarity and grace. He reminisces of a time when "[graceful] language was a matter of basic courtesy, just as today we still often clean up when company is coming."

McWhorter pinpoints the sixties as a key point in the modern dilution of our language. The counter culture movement in the sixties made North American suspicious of authority and academia. With that came an associated distrust of formal speech. "Talk" triumphed over "speech". Public speaking became more and more casual. Years ago, when you sat down to write, you put on a suit. Today, we write in jeans and a t-shirt. In other words, we are uncomfortable dressing up our language. In McWhorter's words, "the American typically relates warmly to the use of English to the extent that it summons the oral, while passing from indifference to discomfort to the extent that its use leans towards the stringent artifice of written language."

Another one of the forces behind this trend, according to McWhorter, is that the English language has simply become a tool. That is, since English is the lingua franca of so many people and nations around the world, we no longer feel it is ours. We do not have the same feeling of pride and ownership that other cultures do. It is important to recognize this loss of feeling when teaching ELA. That is, it is important to know what we are up against. The declining value of poetry indicates a similar decline in our relationship to beautifully crafted language. There is no language for language's sake. In light of that, it makes us understand the difficulty in fostering literature for enjoyment or

enrichment. Teaching an appreciation for the aesthetic aspect of language has become an increasingly difficult task.

McWhorter speaks at length about the effects of computers on language. E-mail technology and instant messaging has increasingly turned writing into an oral activity. More and more, we write the way we talk. In light of this, oracy is now more important than ever. That is, if the trend is towards talk, then we must equip ourselves with the tools necessary to develop oracy.

Further, McWhorter points out that the linguistic expertise that ELA teachers are expected to have has changed dramatically. This book forces us to examine our priorities when it comes to both literacy and professional development. We just might have to shuffle the aspects that we teach. What is the role of formal grammar instruction? Should we emphasize other means of literacy? Should we be emphasizing more electronic means of communicating?

Finally, this book reminds us that it is important to study language as language. That is, a teacher of English benefits from linguistic and cultural studies of the language that they are teaching. It is important to know where English is at, so to speak. In this way, this book is a sort of state of the language address that we should all attend to.

McWhorter, John. *Doing Our Own Thing: The Degradation of Language and Music and Why We Should, Like, Care*. New York: Gotham Books, 2003.

## submissions

*inter★stela needs you...*

✎ We need submissions and feedback in order to sustain and improve this newsletter. We accept submissions for any of the columns included in this newsletter and in addition we are also interested in the following:

- ★ creative writing (fiction and poetry) by teachers
- ★ non-fiction, especially by Saskatchewan teachers abroad

✎ If you are interested, or if you have questions or concerns, please send an e-mail to Ryan Land ([rland@sasktel.net](mailto:rland@sasktel.net)) as a word attachment or in the body of the e-mail.

✎ You must be a member of STELA in order to submit.

✎ There is no payment for publication.