

inter★stela



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

NOVEMBER 2004

“Poetry is a kind of wild justice.”

Susan Musgrave

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from the editor

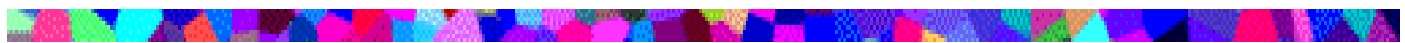
I believe in poetry! There, I've said it. It is still, I am reluctant to admit, a bit of a dirty little secret in our profession and (for shame!) in our classrooms. I write poetry, I read poetry, I teach poetry, I listen to poetry, and every day, I learn a little more about poetry. A couple of lessons ago, the department head in our school came in as a guest lecturer to ignite the classroom with the roots of our language by performing a stirring excerpt from Beowulf, on the heels of a multi-media presentation about the context and significance of the work. The ELA B30 students were arranged into two long rows facing each other over a fire (the multi-media cart as chance would have it—Marshall McLuhan eat your heart out!), to replicate an 7th Century Anglo-Saxon mead hall. The teacher came to me later and asked me if I thought they *really* liked it. I was being sincere when I exclaimed that they very much enjoyed it and I proceeded to request a booking for next year. I think he blushed. His dirty little secret was no longer a secret.

I believe that there is far too little poetry being exposed in our classrooms. My use of the word “exposed” was deliberate. It is rather sad to think that students will only experience the poetry that our subjective tastes and comforts allow us to expose them to. In my case, they would have missed the birth of our language around the mead hall fire had I not gone outside the box of my own poetry. It meant that after the resident expert returned to his own classroom, there were some tough questions left for me. So once again I was afforded the luxury of practising my skills as a learner and, in turn, as a teacher. As for being exposed, poetry is already there in the walls and in the students, and even in the teacher, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. I always try to imagine that an Emily Dickinson, an Atwood, a Leonard Cohen, or an Ondaatje, is sitting in the back row and far be it from me to deny them the opportunity to chew on, or gush forth, some poetry in an English Language Arts classroom!

After missing a long stretch of days, a student recently asked me what she could do to make up for the work she had missed. One of her suggestions was that she

would submit some of her original poems, as she was worried she had missed the “poetry unit.” I laughed and said that she did not miss the “poetry unit” in my classroom because I have never taught one! Do my students experience poetry? You bet they do! In a semester of ELA, students will share the room with about fifty poems for a variety of purposes and sometimes the goal is no more sophisticated than unabashed enjoyment. Believe it or not this fits quite nicely with the objectives in the ELA curriculum. In that same semester students will write between ten to fifteen poems and most of them will look at the mark *after* they have checked the top right hand corner of the poem. You see, I have a *Wall-zine* on the back wall of my classroom where I “publish” about twenty poems every month. If a student has a star in the top right hand corner, it means they made the wall and I want a clean copy. Call me nutty, but I think when students are more interested in whether or not they get their poetry published, and are investing the necessary risk and attention into trying to make this happen, then the poetry is winning. A further aspect of my madness is revealed by my belief that poetry can cure the world. Maybe I was unduly hostile to Mr. McLuhan earlier. If McLuhan was right in suggesting that “the medium is the message,” then there is no better message for an ELA classroom than the embodiment of what Coleridge called, “the best words in their best order.” The question I leave for you, dear colleagues and secret poets, is: *Do you believe in poetry?*

Ryan Land
inter*stela Editor



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from the president

Another school year is now well underway. I hope that each of you had a wonderful school start-up. I certainly have renewed energy this fall, and have been experimenting with many new activities in the classroom. Several colleagues and I have been sharing ideas and planning together, and it has certainly given me more inspiration and motivation to try new things.

I hope that your involvement in STELA can be an avenue for sharing and receiving ideas. We invite you to contribute to the newsletter. We'd also love to hear about your favourite ELA web site – e-mail the link to president@stela.ca so we can add the link to our web site. Our goal is to provide a great resource site for ELA teachers. Also, make sure to bookmark our web site: www.stela.ca.

Our mentorship program is entering phase two. Several people volunteered to be mentor teachers (but, of course, we'd love more mentors!), and we are now beginning to match beginning teachers with mentors. The Beginning Teachers Conference was held in Saskatoon at the end of September, and the Regina conference will be held at the end of October, so we expect several applications for mentorship to arrive soon. We are also sending information to each local organization. If you know of a beginning ELA teacher, be sure to inform him/her of our mentorship program and the benefits of a STELA membership.

We are grateful that a group of teachers from Saskatoon volunteered to organize this year's conference. Conference 2005 will begin the evening of April 14, 2005 and continue on Friday, April 15, 2005 at the Delta Bessborough in Saskatoon. The registration form is available from the web site, and information will be mailed out to schools as well. Be sure to apply early to ensure that PD funding is available.

Enjoy the newsletter. It is our wish that you find inspiration to try something new, and as well, that you become motivated to share your ideas. Despite our geographic locations, we can create a community of ELA teachers, and the spirit of sharing will grow.

Lynn Howse
STELA President
October, 2004

A Tribute to Linda Froshaug

Linda Louise Froshaug was an exceptional teacher, wife, mother, horse trainer, teamster, learner, and friend. Her enthusiasm for life and learning was readily apparent to all who knew her. She devoted herself fully to everything she undertook. Linda obtained her teaching certificate at the Regina campus of the University of Saskatchewan in 1967. In 1984, she returned to Regina with her four small children, between the ages of 4 and 13 – living in Regina during the week, and returning to the farm to help with the work on weekends - and earning her BA with distinction in English.

Linda taught high school English as well as numerous other subjects and grades at Glentworth School from 1985 until 2003. She loved every one of her students and strove to enrich their lives. Linda was at the forefront of current trends in English language arts education. She was a long-time member of STELA who presented at conferences and served as a creative writing judge many times. She also taught an online creative writing course for the Golden Plains school division, and was embarking on an ELA online course with the LTU. She loved Canadian literature, read avidly, and always brought new books to her classes to use. The senior English class will likely never forget the trip she took them on, tracing the route of The Englishman's Boy through Cypress Hills and Fort Benton, Montana.

Linda made sure that each moment of her life was lived to the fullest, and she taught all those around her how to have fun, love, and live. She left an additional legacy in the form of a scholarship set up in her honour for students with an interest in creative writing who go on to postsecondary education in a field related to English. Her memory and her teaching will be cherished always by everyone who knew her.

golden taffy

A Word from the Golden Taffy Editor

Dennis Nesseth

To everyone that has contributed to last 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.

from thistledown press

Celebrating Reading

Denis Dubé, former administrator and teacher

Our schools are faced with untold challenges, demands and expectations. All of these oftentimes become the temporary focus of our energies to the detriment of our real purpose – teaching our students to read, to write and to compute. Yes, we do other things and are expected to be everything for everyone. If we could but manage to remember what our real responsibilities and goals are, we would satisfy all of our critics. How so, you ask? Let us briefly examine it.

Schools are expected to prepare students for the world and its challenges. However, school officials often believe this focus requires being everything to everyone and so they adopt new programs and curricula to present diversified options to students. Really, though, we cannot possibly train everyone for everything. What we can do is to prepare them mentally, emotionally and physically by teaching them to read, to write, and to compute. Through reading we learn to think and to analyze. Through writing we teach them to express themselves and to become even more analytical; and finally we teach them to compute (arithmetic) or to become familiar with numbers and its uses, thus learning how to figure things out. The physical training enables them to become energetically able to cope with mental stress and it helps them to overcome fatigue.

You all know that it is through reading that we learn how to be creative, imaginative, analytical, expressive, etc. etc. What then has happened to reading in our schools? Are we afraid to recognize that this skill is of major importance in helping to shape young minds? Never let anyone tell you they are too busy to read or that they don't have the time to read, or that reading is boring. Reading is not boring, it is the unwillingness of people to recognize that this skill has not been encouraged, developed and promoted from an early age and then continually reinforced, encouraged and developed through all of a child's school years that causes these students to say it is boring. They have never learned to read properly or learned how to appreciate it, in all probability, because they were turned off reading from not being able to do it or from being forced to read 'boring' material.

People who often refuse to read, can't read. Why does this occur? Why not put the resources where they are needed? In reading materials and aids rather than in programs that attempt to provide some sort of training for these same students to get a job in our society. They would not need job training skills if they were better equipped to read. Simplistic solution? Maybe! But, think about it. Are we doing all in our power and with what technology we have to improve a student's reading skill? Our focus should always be on improving the reading skills of our students. If we did, the other challenges schools face would soon dissipate.

Wouldn't it be great if we could once again walk into our schools at a set time and 'hear' the silence of all of the school reading through an uninterrupted period of time? It would not matter what they read as long as they read. This would be for everyone - principals, secretaries, everyone - visitors also, if they happen to show up at that time. A dream? Perhaps, but one worth striving for!



it worked for me

An effective classroom management technique that I learned at a BER workshop was how to "derail" a "challenging" student bent on an argument. All you have to do is change the topic suddenly by asking them, or someone close by, a mundane question like "What's your favourite cereal? Mine is..." They soon forget the argument. Also, in a classroom setting, I would start talking to the chalkboard, complaining that no one appeared to be interested in learning today. I didn't then have to use it often, because I'd hear "Shhh! She's doing it again!"

Debbie Buller, Scott Collegiate

An easy and effective way to deal with late students in my class is to assign silent reading for the first portion of class. I usually give fifteen to thirty minutes of silent reading because we are on a block-scheduled quarter system and our classes are approximately two hours long. Students record how long they have read and keep track of what they have read on a reading log. The reading log is evaluated at both midterm and end of term. Students who are on time benefit from increased print exposure and reading log evaluations, and students who are missing class time due to being late (or absent) also miss out on a portion of their class evaluation. The students who are missing silent reading time will hopefully be more encouraged to attend on time and will then also benefit from print exposure and reading log evaluations. It works for me!

Janine Taylor, Scott Collegiate

stela conference



STELA CONFERENCE 2005

Saskatchewan 1905 - 2005: The Truth about One Hundred Stories

- ★ April 14th and 15th, Delta Bessborough, Saskatoon
- ★ Hosted by Saskatoon Catholic High Schools
- ★ Contact MMcGarity@scs.sk.ca for more information

STELA Conference 2005

Saskatchewan 1905 - 2005: The Truth about One Hundred Stories

Saskatchewan is celebrating its 100th Anniversary of becoming a province in 2005, and the high school English language Arts teachers of Saskatoon Catholic schools are planning a STELA conference that will be appropriately exciting. We plan to start off the conference in dramatic style on the evening of Thursday, April 14, 2005 at the historic and beautiful Bessborough Hotel in downtown Saskatoon. Bring your poetry and your black turtlenecks because we hope to stage STELA's first ever poetry slam! Perhaps after some liquid refreshment and some light entertainment teachers will be ready to put their mouths where their money is and read some of their own poetry to the, no doubt, awestruck audience.

On Friday the 15th the conference really gets rolling with a full buffet breakfast, a scintillating AGM, and some stimulating workshops. Confirmed presenters include Janet McVittie from the U. of S. on writing across the curriculum, Brent Okrainetz and Donna Schindel from Saskatoon Catholic on Content Enhancement, Marina Meyers and Stacey Loopkey on A.P. English strategies for all, and J. Jill Robinson, Writer in Residence at Saskatoon Public Library on Creative non-Fiction.

The conference title is borrowed in part from Tom King's The Truth about Stories. In it King emphasizes the role of story in society. Each section ends with permission to do whatever the audience wants with the story it has just heard, but the text adds, "Don't say you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story, you have heard it now." So don't say you would have been a different teacher if only you had been invited to STELA 2005; you are being invited now.

Core of Discovery: Engaging Voices and Visions

Attention educators...InLand Northwest Council of Teachers of English invites your participation in the National Council of Teachers of English Northwest Regional Conference, "Core of Discovery: Engaging Voices and Visions," to be hosted by INCTE on the Lewis-Clark State College campus March 16-19, 2005.

INCTE is seeking presenters to build a program that not only satisfies those who attend but that reverberates long after the event is over, that filters back into and feeds our communities and classrooms.

Featured speakers include Terry Tempest Williams, author of *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*; Chris Crutcher, author of *Whale Talk*, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, *Stotan!*, and his recent memoir, *King of the Mild Frontier*; Kim Barnes, author of the novel, *Finding Caruso*, and two memoirs, *In the Wilderness* and *Hungry for the World*; Robert Wrigley, author of six collections of poetry, most recently *Lives of the Animals*; Mary Clearman Blew, author of *All But the Waltz* and *Balsam Root*; David Matheson, author of *Red Thunder*, a novel set on the Coeur D'Alene Indian reservation; Louise Freeman-Toole, author of *Standing Up to the Rock*; Scott Poole, author of *Hiding from Salesmen*, a collection of poetry; and Ron McFarland, author or editor of more than a dozen books, including his new and selected poems, *Stranger in Town*; Oregon poet Ingrid Wendt; Claire Rudolf Murphy, author of *Gold Rush Women*; filmmaker Ron Craig; historian Carlos Schwantes; NCTE speakers Bobbie Cirizia Houtchens and Dale Allender.

Registration for the conference is \$145.00. Housing rates will start at \$78 for a single, \$98 for a double, at Red Lion Hotel, or \$55.99 at Inn America. For more information, contact, Core of Discovery Chair, Crag Hill at (208) 892-8826 or by e-mail: orion@pullman.com. Check out our website (<http://www.wsu.edu/~discovery/>).

on the lighter side

How is an English Teacher like a judge?

They both hand out sentences.

REAL TEACHERS

- Real teachers grade papers in the car, during commercials, in faculty lounges and have been seen grading in church.
- Real teachers clutch a pencil while thinking and make notes in the margins of books.
- Real teachers have disjointed necks from writing on boards without turning their backs on the class.
- Real teachers are written up in medical journals for size and elasticity of kidneys and bladders.
- Real teachers have been timed gulping down a full lunch in 2 minutes, 18 seconds. Master teachers can eat faster than that.
- Real teachers can predict exactly which parents will show up at Open House.
- Real teachers never teach the conjugations of "lie" and "lay" to eighth graders.
- Real teachers know it is better to seek forgiveness than to ask permission.
- Real teachers know the shortest distance and the length of travel time from their classroom to the office.
- Real teachers know the difference among what must be graded, what ought to be graded, and what probably should never again see the light of day.
- Real teachers have their best conferences in the parking lot.
- Real teachers buy Excedrin and Advil in bulk.
- Real teachers hear the heartbeats of crisis; always have time to listen; know they teach students, not subjects; and they are absolutely non-expendable.

Children were called upon in a classroom to make sentences with words chosen by the teacher. The teacher smiled when Jack raised his hand to participate. She gave him the words 'defeat,' 'deduct,' 'defense,' and 'detail.' Jack stood seriously for a while with all eyes focused on him awaiting his reply:

"Defeat of deduct went over defense before detail!"

Teacher: Why are you late, Joseph?

Joseph: Because of a sign down the road.

Teacher: What does a sign have to do with your being late?

Joseph: The sign said, "School Ahead, Go Slow!"

review

A Review of Parker J. Palmer's The Courage to Teach

Gillian Focht

Palmer's book, *The Courage to Teach* is a fantastic display of beautiful language and philosophical insights intended to better the personal and professional lives of tired and emotionally drained educators. However, the book also inspires the pursuit of self-knowledge and every teacher will benefit from the personal journey of mapping one's internal landscape. Through personal insights and self reflection, Palmer creates a text with the sole purpose of answering the question: "Who is the self that teaches?" The result is a touching book that not makes for an excellent read, but also serves as a reminder for educators of the joy and love that arises as we teach students and fulfill our own personal needs and beliefs simultaneously.

Parker begins the book by pointing out qualities that many students consider the necessities for good teachers to possess. Oddly enough, many teachers were not always the most creative or inventive but all possessed a strong sense of identity and all were good people who visibly displayed a love for teaching, for their subject area, and for the students within the classroom. Once this was established, Palmer focused on stories and insights that assist the reader in identifying their own identity and integrity. In addition, Parker suggests that schools are often communities of fear. Palmer points out the various ways in which school systems encourage fear from students, teachers and administrators alike and how to overcome these fears to create a positive classroom climate. Once these chapters have been read, professionals should possess a clearer sense of their inner selves and how to stay true to this even through periods of fear and self-doubt within the classroom.

Most interesting of all is the author's use of everyday anecdotes to support his points. For example, Palmer talks at great length about paradoxes in education. However, before doing this he points out paradoxes within the real world, suggesting that people must create a balance within in order to live a full and complete life. By addressing the issue in such a way, it reinforces the fact that educators must balance the needs of technical and factual information with the real world curriculum of student experience. Palmer also uses these techniques when discussing the ingenious philosophy of subject-centered classrooms, in which the content is the center of attention and the joint (teacher/student) pursuit to discover the knowledge within the subject, is the core purpose for learning.

Palmer's final section of the book deals with the need for collegial talk within schools. All too often, he points out, teachers feel they cannot communicate with other colleagues for fear of being seen as a failure or as inadequate. The book prompts educators to better themselves by sharing experiences and insights with one another, while also supporting each other in living a life according to their identity and the integrity of their principles. In doing so, Palmer succeeds in encouraging educational reform and changes within our traditional public institutions.

I highly recommend this book to every educator, both within elementary and high schools. Palmer uses graceful and well-crafted language to inspire each of us to be better people, and, in turn, better educators, by connecting to our hearts and our inner selves. Although the text is geared towards post-secondary education (as he is a University professor), it is easily adapted to the problems and challenges of all educators. It is evident that Palmer achieves his goals and has written a book that encourages all educators to connect with themselves. It is a joy to become immersed within Palmer's world and philosophy.

Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1998.



lesson plan

ELA 20: *Poetry Analysis*

Lynne Howse

This assignment meets many of the ELA 20 objectives:

- Paraphrase a poetry passage.
- Recognize author's purpose, form, and techniques.
- State and evaluate author's theme and tone.
- Prepare a dramatic reading of a poetry selection.
- Speak to express understanding.
- Speak to clarify and extend thinking.
- Speak to share thoughts, opinions, and feelings.
- Recognize and adjust verbal presentation elements (i.e., articulation, pronunciation, volume, tempo, pitch, stress) effectively and in keeping with purpose and audience needs.
- Review own oral activities carefully for content, organization, delivery, and style.

I give the students the following instructions on a handout:

1. Locate a poem or song that deals with adolescence.
2. Paraphrase the poem or song. (This will be turned in for evaluation).

You will complete the following steps by recording yourself on an audiotape. You will be evaluated on the content of your answer as well as your speaking.

3. Prepare a dramatic reading of the poem or song.
4. Comment on how this poem or song deals with adolescence.
5. Discuss the theme of the poem.
6. Identify the literary devices and figurative language in the poem.
7. Provide a personal response to the author's ideas and techniques.

Be sure to review carefully for content, organization, delivery, and style. Just as you would revise a writing assignment, re-do your speaking assignment until you are satisfied.

Evaluation:

1. Paraphrase (writing assignment)

2. Dramatic Reading
 - clear enunciation
 - appropriate pausing
 - projection of feeling through effective voice
 - presented fluently and at an appropriate pace
3. Content of commentary

Note: One of the benefits of this assignment is that it doesn't take days of class time for presentations, and I still get a chance to evaluate all of these areas.

lesson plan

Middle Years ELA Lesson Plan: *The Think Aloud Process*

Chris Beingessner, Middle Years Teacher

While we read, our mind is constantly thinking. By being conscious of our thoughts as we read, we can develop our ability to think about our thinking (metacognition) and improve our reading abilities! Teachers should model the strategy while the students use the checklist to tally the “think-alouds” used by the teacher. Then students work in partners and do the same for one another.

Types of Think-Alouds:

Predicting

- I predict...
- In the next part, I think...
- I think this is...
- Perhaps...

Picturing

- I picture...
- I can see...

Making Connections

- This is like a...
- This reminds me of...

Identifying a Problem

- I got confused when...
- I'm not sure of...
- I didn't expect...

Using Fix-Ups

- I think I'll have to re-read...review...

Maybe I'll need to read on...think about getting a new book...

Think-Aloud	Tally
Predicting	
Picturing	
Making Connections	
Identifying a Problem	
Using Fix-Ups	

lesson plan

Elementary ELA Lesson Plan: *Varied Voices*

Target Grades: 4-6

Jason Howse, W.S. Hawrylak, Regina

- ✓ This lesson, inspired by *Whose Line is it Anyway?* allows students to give interesting dialogue to the characters in their writing.
- ✓ I begin by reading a passage from a book aloud, and I then ask the students to give a recount while in the role of a particular character. The type of character does not need to be related to the text, but should be one with a specific cultural or occupational dialect (Hip Hop artist, construction worker, etc.).
- ✓ As a variation, one could ask the class to guess the type of character that was giving the recount, and discuss the linguistic elements that made this clear.
- ✓ Next, I have the students write a short response to the passage, attempting to put these varied dialects into written form. This is a fun way to help students overcome the obstacle of using uninteresting dialogue in their written work, and it helps to create realistic dialogue.



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 (rcland@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.