



MCTE News

Newsletter of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English

Volume 45, Number 2
Winter 2005

President's Column

I spent all day yesterday worried about Brian's grade. I teach an adapted English class at our local high school, a class for students with special needs who have failed "mainstream" English classes. It was the first semester of such a class so I was busy building relationships with students, finding out what they could and couldn't do, and in some cases, what they would and wouldn't do.

Brian came into my class the first day with black hair hanging down in front of his eyes. In fact, I didn't see his eyes the whole first quarter, until he shaved his head into a huge purple Mohawk. He wore the same denim shorts, high-top tennis shoes, and green field jacket every day. He was pierced, tattooed, and angry. Most of his contributions to discussions were challenging and I had to set a boundary quickly about drugs, alcohol, and sex, things he liked to glorify for the entertainment of his classmates. His writing was often about those same things.

He was suspended, a few times for five days, for refusing to do detention or school-after-hours. Some days when he was in school, he came in and put his head down until the bell rang again. He talked about staying out all night partying, but also about several attempts at treatment. When he developed bronchitis late in the fall, he visited the nurse's office but never went to the doctor. He told me poor people can't afford doctors so he struggled through it.

As prickly as he could be, some days there were gentle moments. He handed me a paper one day and when I read the first paragraph, I asked who she was in the paper. He whispered, "It's about my sister. She passed."

Brian asked often to leave class to see the school social worker and I always let him go; his problems outside of school seemed more important than what I was asking him to do. But there was never any resolution. He just came to school most days with this huge load of problems and we did the best we could.

At the end of the first quarter, Brian's percentage according to my online grade book was way below passing so I failed him. I talked to Brian all the time about his work, about his grade, about what help I could offer but at the end of this quarter, his percentage was still way below passing. I thought about it for weeks. What would be most helpful? A failing grade that might be a strong message that this kind of slacking won't get him through high school? A gift of a passing grade that might motivate him to try harder? Would failing provoke a crisis that might encourage him to look at his issues and do something about them?

I went back and forth yesterday. First leaving the grade the way it came out, failing. Then I went back and manipulated some numbers, gave him partial credit for things he had not turned in, but that I knew he had done, and he passed. Then I changed it back.

I still don't know what to do. What could be the benefit of failing a tenth grader with the kinds of life issues he has? Did I work hard enough to make adaptations in my teaching so Brian could be successful? Will it make a difference either way? Or am I agonizing over something that won't matter in the long run?

Teresa Saum

In Memoriam – Louise Rosenblatt



photo: Sandy Hayes

Louise Rosenblatt, at age 100, died February 8 of complications from pneumonia. She was Professor Emerita of New York University and a former faculty member of Barnard College, Columbia University, and City University of New York. With the publication of her classic *Literature as Exploration* in 1938, Louise pioneered the theory of reading as a transaction between reader and text that has remained a powerful influence in English and language arts classrooms today.

Even at 100, Louise continued to be a vital and influential presence in our profession. In 2003 she was presented with lifetime achievement awards from both NCTE and the National Research Conference. She was present at this fall's NCTE conference where she was honored at a standing room only celebration and was also recognized at the Middle Mosaic session.

She continued to work until her death, writing and reviewing articles for other writers, including protegee Kylene Beers. This month she published her first book for Heinemann, making her their newest and oldest author. *Making Meaning with Texts* is a collection of her most important work exploring the depth and breadth of her theory. Her life as well as her work is an inspiration.

MCTE Dues Increase

At the December 11, 2004, Board meeting, MCTE officers voted to approve a mild increase in membership dues. Effective October 2005, annual dues will increase from \$25 to \$40; students and Minnesota Reading Association members' dues will increase from \$15 to \$20. For regular members, a three-year renewal package is available for \$100.

MCTE dues have not increased for well over ten years; in that time, our outreach projects have grown more extensive and costly. Additionally, inflationary increases associated with mailings and conference expenditures continue to outpace the dues.

While we are loath to take this step, we realize that if we are to remain a vital, dynamic professional organization, we must sustain a budget that allows us to offer renowned speakers at our fall and spring conferences, journals showcasing student and professional writing, and other news and information relevant to the lives of English/language arts teachers.

It is our hope that you will continue your association with MCTE.

Congratulations!

New National Board Certified Teachers

Mary Cathryn Ricker, St. Paul (MCTE Member)

Mary Malmstrom Poulsen, Minneapolis

Mary Poulsen Malmstrom, Minneapolis

Susan Moore, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan

Patricia Rebarchik, Hastings

Andrea Thompson, Minneapolis

National Board Renewal

Sandy Hayes, Becker (MCTE Member)

MCTE Journal Update

In case anyone missed it, MCTE's *Minnesota English Journal* has completed its transformation from traditional hard-copy to on-line format. The result has been the creation of a fall issue that is lean, clean, readable, professional, downloadable, and capable of being imported easily into the classroom. With the expert aid of our technology intern Cheryl Masse, John Banschbach and I have reformatted *MEJ* to mirror the design and layout of the most respected professional magazines in our field.

Of course, since *MEJ* seeks to serve your professional interests and needs, we want to hear what you think about it. You can send your comments to me (straits@mnsu.edu) or John (John.Banschbach@mnsu.edu).

Just as importantly, we are seeking submissions for the next (Fall 2005) issue. We hope that our deadline of **June 30, 2005**, will provide ample time for you to draft, edit, and submit articles that focus on theory of teaching language and literature, praxis, or some combination of both. Please consult the "call for submissions" page in the current fall issue for topic suggestions or send me an e-mail note.

One more thing. John and I are deeply committed to making the work that MCTE publishes as responsive as possible to the many audiences that MCTE seeks to serve: four-year college and university instructors; community and technical college instructors; high school and middle school teachers; and elementary school teachers. In order to better serve the needs of elementary school teachers, we are contemplating the creation of a new journal—with a speculative date of publication in Spring 2006—that will represent the best thinking and practice of Minnesota elementary school teachers in areas such as language arts, writing, collaborative learning in language arts, technology in language arts, and assessment and that will provide a forum for discussing current challenges as well as exchanging ideas and strategies that work. In order for this concept to become operational, we are soliciting articles from Minnesota elementary school teachers before the deadline of **August 30, 2005**. In the next couple of months, watch *MCTE News* and www.mcte.org for more details.

John and I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Bill Dyer, Minnesota State University, Mankato

Note: To download the Fall issue of *MEJ* go to www.mcte.org/journal/mejdownloads.shtml



Book Ends

Jake Reinvented - Gordon Korman

Who is Jake Garrett, the new student at F. Scott Fitzgerald High School? He appears over the summer and quickly becomes known for his Friday night parties—as well as his polished looks, his immediate star-status on the football team, and his interest in the quarterback's girlfriend, Didi. The novel's narrator, Rick, soon befriends the mysterious Jake, though Rick knows little more than any other student about this newcomer.

Korman's young adult novel is a reimagining of the classic *The Great Gatsby*, set in a typical American high school. Korman's use of the plot and themes of *Gatsby* generally works well, though a few of the attempts at clever parallels fall flat. This new novel could serve as an interesting companion piece to the original, generating many comparisons and a discussion what truly makes a "classic." —**Rob Gardner**

The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society

David W. McCurdy, James P. Spradley, and Dianna J. Shandy

The Cultural Experience has helped generations of students discover the excitement of ethnographic research through participation in relatively familiar cultures in North American society. Students are taught how to set up an ethnographic field study, choose a microculture, and find and approach an informant, as well as how to ask ethnographic questions, record data, and organize and analyze what they have learned. The second edition has been expanded to include more extensive strategies for writing the final ethnographic paper. The book features ten short but substantive, well-written student ethnographies on such microcultures as exotic dancing, firefighting, pest extermination, and the work of midwives and police detectives.

Minnesota Book Awards Finalists

The Minnesota Humanities Commission has announced the finalists for the 17th Annual Minnesota Book Awards. Close to 300 books were submitted for consideration in the 2005 Minnesota Book Awards, many by first-time authors. To be eligible, works must have been copyrighted in 2004 and created by a Minnesota author, editor, or artist. On January 29, a panel of selectors, including MCTE Board Member Patti Strandquist, from across the state gathered in St. Paul to review entries for each of the 13 categories, from which they chose the 52 finalists. The winners for each category will be determined by a separate panel of volunteer judges. Winners will be announced April 16.

Finalists in four categories are:

Children's Fiction and Poetry: *The Darkest Evening* - William Durbin; *The Double-Digit Club* - Marion Dane Baue; *Grass Angel* - Julie Schumacher; *Snap* - Alison McGhee

Novel and Short Story: *Left Hand* - Ken McCullough; *The Real Minerva* - Mary Sharratt; *Those Who Save Us* - Jenna Blum; *The Work of Wolves* - Kent Meyers

Poetry: *Atlas* - Katrina Vandenberg; *The Jewish Fake Book* - Sima Rabinowitz; *Naming the Stars* - Joyce Sutphen; *Playing the Black Piano* - Bill Holm; *Shut Up Shut Down* - Mark Nowak

Popular Fiction: *Alone At Night* - KJ Erickson; *Blood Hollow* - William Kent Krueger; *Lake of Sorrows* - Erin Hart; *Live Bait* - P.J. Tracy; *The Tarnished Eye* - Judith Guest

Young Adult Fiction and Poetry: *The Alison Rules* - Catherine Clark; *Godless* - Pete Hautman; *A Long Year of Silence* - Kathryn Adams Doty; *Too Big a Storm* - Marsha Qualey

For the entire list of finalists, go to www.minnesotahumanities.org

MCTE Spring Conference - Duluth Convention Center
April 8 & 9 - 9 to 4:30 Friday; 9 to 1 Saturday
Registration opens 7:45 a.m. each day



Superior Ideas, Superior Practices

Program

Authors: Freya Manfred, Cezarija Abartis, Stephen Schwandt, and Bart Sutter

Break-out sessions: Literature Circles; Perspectives from the Writing Center; MCA-II Assessments; Reading and Writing with Nonfiction in the Intermediate Grades; Poetry of Robert Frost; Creating an E-Zine; Creative Writing Techniques for All Ages/Stages; Integrating Literacy; College-Ready Writing Skills; Literary Make-Over; Poetry Performance; Community Programs in the Arts and Sciences; New Rivers Press; Word Warriors Press; New Moon Editorial Board; The Small Group Discussion; Writing Researched Paragraphs; Safe Spaces for Critiquing Student Work. *(For complete listing and schedule, check www.mcte.org)*

Lodging in Duluth

MCTE has a block of rooms reserved at **The Inn on Lake Superior** in Canal Park. Conference rate: \$99/regular room; \$109/suite. Mention the MCTE conference to guarantee these rates. Rates good until March 10. Reservations must be made directly with the hotel: 1-888-668-4352; 1-218-726-1111

Registration

Please check one:

Registration rate includes breakfast buffet and lunch

- \$170 Full conference registration
- \$120 Friday only
- \$70 Saturday only
- \$50 Special rate for full-time students & student teachers
Please identify your college: _____

Registrations received after March 25 and onsite registrations will be charged an additional \$20

Full conference registration includes MCTE membership for one year. Current MCTE members will have their memberships extended one year.

Please send this registration form and payment (checks payable to MCTE) mailed no later than March 22 to:

JeanMarie Burtness, MCTE, Box 480122,
Coon Rapids, MN 55448

Name _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

School Name: _____

Please direct registration questions to JeanMarie Burtness, jzb@burtness.com

>> Fast Forward: Humor from the Internet

BELOIT COLLEGE MINDSET LIST® FOR THE CLASS OF 2008

www.beloit.edu/~pubaff/releases/mindset_2008.htm

1. Most students entering college this fall were born in 1986.
2. Desi Arnaz, Orson Welles, Roy Orbison, Ted Bundy, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Cary Grant have always been dead.
3. "Heeeere's Johnny!" is a scary greeting from Jack Nicholson, not a warm welcome from Ed McMahon.
4. The Energizer bunny has always been going, and going, and going.
5. Large fine-print ads for prescription drugs have always appeared in magazines.
6. Photographs have always been processed in an hour or less.
7. They never got a chance to drink 7-Up Gold, Crystal Pepsi, or Apple Slice.
8. Baby Jessica could be a classmate.
9. Parents may have been reading *The Bourne Supremacy* or *It* as they rocked them in their cradles.
10. Alan Greenspan has always been setting the nation's financial direction.
11. The U.S. has always been a Prozac nation.
12. They have always enjoyed the comfort of pleather.
13. Harry has always known Sally.
14. They never saw Roseanne Roseannadanna live on Saturday Night Live.
15. There has always been a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
16. They never ate a McSub at McD's.
17. There has always been a Comedy Channel.
18. Bill and Ted have always been on an excellent adventure.
19. They were never tempted by smokeless cigarettes.
20. Robert Downey, Jr. has always been in trouble.
21. Martha Stewart has always been cooking up something with someone.
22. They have always been comfortable with gay characters on television.
23. Mike Tyson has always been a contender.
24. The government has always been proposing we go to Mars, and it has always been deemed too expensive.
25. There have never been any Playboy Clubs.
26. There have always been night games at Wrigley Field.
27. Rogaine has always been available for the follicularly challenged.
28. They never saw USA Today or the Christian Science Monitor as a TV news program.
29. Computers have always suffered from viruses.
30. We have always been mapping the human genome.
31. Politicians have always used rock music for theme songs.
32. Network television has always struggled to keep up with cable.
33. O'Hare has always been the most delay-plagued airport in the U.S.
34. Ivan Boesky has never sold stock.
35. Toll-free 800 phone numbers have always spelled out catchy phrases.
36. Bethlehem has never been a place of peace at Christmas.
37. Episcopal women bishops have always threatened the foundation of the Anglican Church.
38. Svelte Oprah has always dominated afternoon television; who was Phil Donahue anyway?
39. They never flew on People Express.
40. AZT has always been used to treat AIDS.
41. The international community has always been installing or removing the leader of Haiti.
42. Oliver North has always been a talk show host and news commentator.
43. They have suffered through airport security systems since they were in strollers.
44. They have done most of their search for the right college online.
45. Aspirin has always been used to reduce the risk of a heart attack.
46. They were spared the TV ads for Zamfir and his panpipes.
47. Castro has always been an aging politician in a suit.
48. There have always been non-stop flights around the world without refueling.
49. M.A.S.H. was a game: Mansion, Apartment, Shelter, House.
50. Cher hasn't aged a day.

MCTE News

Minnesota Council of Teachers of English
19019 180th Avenue
Big Lake, MN 55309

Nonprofit postage paid Monticello, MN Permit No. 249

*If your label is high-
lighted, please renew.
Form at www.mcte.org*

