

MCTE News

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Newsletter of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English

President's Column - by Jacqueline Arnold

Children's Literature, Briefly (2008) by Michael O. Tunnell and James S. Jacobs, a textbook I use as a resource in the children's literature courses I teach, provides a self-assessment that invites pre-service elementary teachers to consider how positive a reading model they will be for their students. The questions -- "I read in a book for personal pleasure at least two different days per week."; "During the past 3 months, I found myself showing an interesting book to someone else or mentioning it in conversation."; "Two of my favorite authors for adults are . . ." -- are followed by author commentary explaining the importance of these behaviors. The follow-up remarks point to the importance of a teacher's reading life in fostering her students' reading: "If teachers aren't reading, they can't deliver an honest love of books to students."; "If teachers never talk about the books they read, their influence will be limited.;" "Teachers who are reading generally will have a broader interest than just children's books" (213-214).

In the throes of teaching, overwhelmed by all the reading we have to do to prepare for our classes, we can neglect to nurture our personal reading lives. That was why this past holiday vacation I read some of the books I had stacked on my bedside table. As usual, while exploring books in which I had a personal interest, I also found books that will become part of my classes (and would be appropriate to a senior high audience). I would like to recommend some of those books to you in the hope that they will enrich your reading life or those of your students.

Although many of us are wide readers of fiction because of our literature background, we may be less familiar with non-fiction works. As I have grown older, I have found myself increasingly enjoying non-fiction because of its power to open my eyes to new understandings about individuals, our society, and historical eras of which I was previously unaware. *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers is one such work. Focusing on the experience of a Syrian American man, Abdulrahman Zeitoun, and his wife, Kathy, who are residents of New Orleans, Eggers describes the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the dangers of military law gone astray. Readers follow Zeitoun as he waits out the hurricane in his family home, ferries other hurricane survivors to safety, struggles to find food and water, and then after being falsely accused of a crime, experiences imprisonment. We become horrified by the ease with which an "everyman" of Arab descent gets lost in the system. As Eggers tells the story of Zeitoun's present, he also interweaves the past, to tell the story of Kathy and Zeitoun's early lives and marriage, the growth of their successful business, their contributions to their community, and Kathy's increasingly desperate efforts to find out the fate of her husband. This work gives us a sense of how the hurricane and our government's response to it changed the lives of ordinary inhabitants of New Orleans.

Good world novels set in the present or the past allow readers to armchair travel to expe-

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Opportunity:

The Guy Bond Reading Conference "Developing Critical Readers and Writers" will be April 29-30. A celebration of the professional contributions of Professor Richard Beach will also be part of the conference. For more information and online registration, visit:

<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/reading/events/guybond2011/default.html>

rience other countries, cultures, and times. *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat and *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga are two outstanding examples of this category. Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* is set in the 1937 Dominican Republic, but its protagonist, Amabelle, is a young Haitian woman. The novel follows Amabelle and her companions as they flee the Dominican Republic when its dictator Trujillo orders the army to massacre the 15,000-20,000 Haitian men, women, and children who live there, many of them working as servants or laborers in the sugar cane fields. This novel dramatizes an atrocity unknown to many Americans which was orchestrated by a dictator who continued to enjoy US support even after this event. Haiti has been a focus of our news since the 2010 earthquake, so student readers will be able to make a connection to this powerful novel. Danticat's memoir *Brother I am Dying* is another of her works that would be engaging for high school readers and older. It contrasts the lives of two brothers – Danticat's immigrant father and his brother who remains in Haiti. The memoir explores both worlds so readers get a sense of life in Haiti in recent times, the difficulties of being a Haitian immigrant in the US, and in its tragic ending--the pitfalls for asylum seekers who run afoul of homeland security.

From his office in Bangalore, *The White Tiger*'s first person narrator invites us to share his vision of contemporary Indian society in a series of "letters" he writes to the Prime Minister of China. Balram, a former driver for a wealthy land-owner family, uses his life story as an illustration of the corruption and lack of mobility that keeps "the roosters" trapped in the huge "coops" of modern day India. In what he calls an entrepreneurial gesture, Balram frees himself from the coops by murdering his master and using his master's money to create a lucrative call-center business. Although the plot sounds sordid, Adiga's narrative voice is very entertaining, easy to read, and pulls readers into the novel until its finish.

The final author I would like to recommend is Octavia Butler, a master of the science fiction/fantasy genre. My vacation reading was *Lilith's Brood*, a compilation of three Butler novels set in a spaceship and on an Earth that is being newly re-settled after humans destroyed its ability to sustain life centuries earlier. The planet's new settlers are alien and human. The humans that were saved from extinction or self-destruction by the alien species have been genetically altered so they can produce a new race of children who will share human and alien characteristics. The trilogy as a whole explores the difficulties people have interacting with and accepting others different from themselves and the lengths they will go to maintain the freedom to control their own lives. If this novel seems a little too science fiction for some of you, I would like to recommend Butler's other works as more realistic and engaging for senior high readers. *Kindred* explores slavery through the eyes of a present day African American woman who time travels to a plantation in the pre-Civil War South and *Parable of the Sower* is a dystopic "road" novel which opens in a future Los Angeles where anarchy and shortages of water, gas and food have led people to prey on each other. The novel's teen age protagonist becomes the leader of a group of survivors partially because she has created a new religion which she uses to form community. Both of these novels provoke lots of discussion.

I hope these recommendations might be useful to you, nudging you to prioritize your own reading lives, or that Tunnell and Jacobs' recommendations to young teachers will give you the excuse you need to see your personal reading as professional development. I know that my vacation reading made me energized and excited about beginning the Spring teaching semester. It helped me remember my love for my profession and why I have chosen to do what I do.

References

- Adiga, Aravind. (2008). *The white tiger*. New York: Free Press
- Butler, Octavia. (1979). *Kindred*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Butler, Octavia. (1989). *Lilith's brood*. New York: Grand Central Publishin.
- Butler, Octavia. (1993). *Parable of the sower*. New York: Warner Books, Inc.
- Danticat, Edwidge. (2007). *Brother I'm dying*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Danticat, Edwidge. (1998). *The farming of bones*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Eggers, Dave. (2009). *Zeitoun*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Tunnell, Michael O. & Jacobs, James S. (2008). *Children's literature, briefly*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.



MCTE's 2011 Spring Conference

WWW.MCTE.ORG

REGISTRATION INFORMATION AVAILABLE ONLINE

WWW.MCTE.ORG



“Literacy at the Lake” April 15 & 16, 2011

Friday, April 15th

* Frank Sentwali, spoken word artist and performance poet, welcome and keynote



* Lorna Landvik, author, actor, comedian, lunch speaker and evening entertainment

*Four timeslots for breakout sessions presented by our members!

Saturday, April 16th

*Teacher and author Jim Burke will be presenting an extended workshop 9 a.m - 2 p.m.

* Letters About Literature presentations during lunch

*Keynote Speakers
*Book Vendors
*Break-out Sessions
*Awesome Door Prizes
*Great Fun!

Registration Info

Date:
April 15 & 16, 2011

Conference Location:
Cragun's Resort & Hotel on Gull Lake in Brainerd, MN

Cost:
Full Registration: \$190
Single Day: \$100

*Full-time student/
Student teacher: \$50 per day

Registration deadline:
April 1, 2011!

“Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.”

~John Cotton Dana

Visit MCTE online for Registration Forms and Hotel Information:

www.mcte.org



Photo by: Sandy Hayes

Minnesota Council of Teachers of English
Spring Conference 2011

Literacy at the Lake

April 15 & 16

Cragun's Resort & Hotel,
Brainerd

I request vegetarian meals.

Full registration: \$190

~ Includes membership, Friday and Saturday sessions and all meals

Friday only: \$100

~ Includes membership, Friday sessions, continental breakfast, lunch, dinner

I am staying for Friday dinner

Saturday only: \$100

~ Includes membership, Jim Burke workshop, full breakfast, lunch

Special rates for full-time students and student teachers

I am a full time student at _____

I am a student teacher at _____

Friday only: \$50

~ Includes membership, Friday sessions, continental breakfast, lunch

I am staying for Friday dinner

Saturday only: \$50

~ Includes Jim Burke mini-workshop, full breakfast, lunch

Both Friday and Saturday: \$100

~ Includes membership, Friday and Saturday sessions and all meals

For lodging information, go to www.mcte.org. Hotel reservation deadline: March 14.

Please send a copy of this registration form and payment in the form of a **check made out to MCTE** (no purchase orders, please) **no later than April 1**. *There are no refunds for cancellations. Registrations postmarked after April 1 and onsite registrations will be charged an additional \$20.*

Name _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

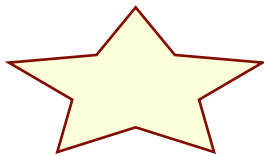
email (please write legibly) _____

School Name _____

Affinity level: Elementary High School Middle School English Education College

Mail to: **MCTE**, 7515 Izaak Walton Road, Bloomington, MN 55438

Registration questions? Contact Liz Boeser: bizlazer@gmail.com



**PREFERRED LODGING HELD UNTIL
March 7th, 2011**

(Room Rates and availability after March 7th is NOT GUARANTEED)

One nights deposit required with reservation
(Reservation will not be processed without deposit)
No deposit required with Voucher or Purchase Order

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ St _____ Zip _____
Day Phone(____) _____ / _____ to _____ / _____
Arrive /Depart Dates: _____ / _____ to _____ / _____
E-mail Address _____

Used for CONFIRMATION - Please print clearly
Your mail address will not be given to any other party for any purpose.
Please check here if we may send you special Craguns offers

Special Craguns Offers Yes Please No Thanks

SPECIAL REQUESTS

(i.e. Room Accessibility, Service Animal, Dietary, etc.)
 Wheelchair Accessible Limited Accessibility
 Impaired Mobility Impaired Vision Hearing
Please Explain: _____

INDICATE DEPOSIT METHOD OF PAYMENT

- Voucher/Purchase order Send with form.
- Check Send with form - Payable to Cragun's
- Credit Card Card charged upon receipt of form
- Debit Card Card charged upon receipt of form

Upon check-in, the debit card will be charged for the remainder of your stay.

Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover cards accepted
\$ _____ Deposit amount to be charged to:

Card # _____ Exp / _____
Cardholder's Name: _____

CRAGUN'S LODGING RESERVATION
MN Council English Teachers – April 14 – 16, 2011

ONE-NIGHT RATE INCLUDES

- Friday night lodging
 - MN sales tax & service charge
- \$116.50 Single or Double Occupancy

Corridor Room: Balcony overlooks Gull Lake, or indoor pool, coffeemaker, refrigerator, microwave, some with fireplace
All Rooms are Non-Smoking
\$300.00 charge for smoking in a non-smoking room

List the names of all people in the room: _____

For safety and security reasons, Cragun's will not assign roommates.

CRAGUN'S HAS A NO PET POLICY
(Please call us for a list of local boarding facilities)
And A No Jetskis /Waverunners Policy
PRIOR NOTIFICATION OF CERTIFIED SERVICE ANIMALS REQUIRED

Complete 1 Form Per Room.
Make A Copy Of This Form For Your Records.

MAIL OR FAX FORM (No phone reservations)
Cragun's Resort & Hotel on Gull Lake
11000 Craguns Drive, Brainerd, MN 56401
Fax Number: (218) 825-1995
Website: www.craguns.com
Questions? Call (218) 825-2700 ext. 8400

CHILDREN RATES

The per night rate for children 13 and older is \$16 per night, sales tax included. No meals included. Children 12 and under stay free.

Number of children: _____
Age and name of each child: _____

EARLY ARRIVAL / STAYOVER

\$116.50 Per Night, Per Room
Single or Double Occupancy.
Rate includes MN sales tax.
People in the Room _____

- I will be arriving Thursday
- I will be staying over Saturday

GOLF INFORMATION & TEE TIMES

To guarantee availability of tee times or to make Reservations at The Legacy Courses at Cragun's call 1-800-272-4867 ext. 8100 or (218) 825-2800.

Cancellation/Refund Policy:

1. Less than 30 days prior to arrival-NO DEPOSIT REFUND
2. At 30 days or more prior to arrival-REFUND less \$40 processing fee.
3. When using a Voucher or Purchase Order, Cancellation /Refund Policy will apply.

7335/MZ/JW

Please Note: The deadline for lodging registration has been **extended to March 14th.**

MCTE Celebrates New Journal Publications!

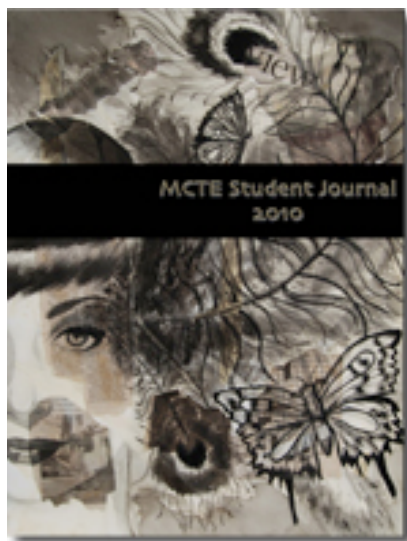
The new issue of the Minnesota English Journal is now online at www.mcte.org. Though always a quality publication under the editorship of Bill Dyer, MCTE is proud of Brian C. Lewis's work on this issue, as it is Brian's inaugural journal edition. Fitting with the journal's theme of "Continuity and Change," this journal also marks MCTE's effort to support the rigor and professionalism of its pieces through a new peer-review process. While the work published in the *Minnesota English Journal* has been exceptional in the past, a peer-review committee ensures continued quality and offers a rich writing experience for feedback and growth. The pieces featured in this journal were juried by an editorial board including Jacqueline Arnold, Jessica Dockter Tierney, William Dyer, Jeremy Hoffman, Rachel Malchow Lloyd, and Charon Tierney. Thank you to all who participated in this issue.



Sections of Interest in This Issue:

- * Article Downloads: Defining Our Profession
- * Multicultural Literature in the Curricula
- * Working with New Media
- * Why Teach This Text?
- * Poem

While online, also check out the *MCTE Student Journal*!



The latest edition of the Student Writing Issue of the *Minnesota English Journal* also features excellent work by students in middle school and high school. Katie Kritzeck of Elk River High School is now the new editor and has produced a lovely journal that should be enjoyable not only for reading but also for providing models of effective writing for class use. Besides submitting student work, if you have writing lessons that have

proven to be powerful or useful for teaching specific skills or for motivating students to consider their writer within, please submit them with your reflections. Please contact Katie Kritzeck at kathryn.kritzeck@elkriver.k12.mn.us if you have questions. Submissions for next year's issue should be turned in by this summer.

Also, this is a reminder that many of student pieces compiled in this journal originate from NCTE's writing programs like eighth grade's Promising Young Writers Program and 11th grade's Achievement Awards Writing Contest. Please visit www.ncte.org to learn more about submission procedures! Make writing in your classroom real by sharing it with communities outside of the classroom. Furthermore, if your school produces a literary magazine of student work, please submit it to NCTE's PRESLM Contest. For more information, visit www.ncte.org/awards/student/PRESLM.

Commentary from a member...

From test score reports or graduation rates to media coverage of teacher unions or films like *Waiting for Superman*, the profession of teaching can sometimes leave one feeling at the very least criticized, and more often demoralized. While MCTE member Tom Weber reviews below another infamous quote that still influences the public tenor when discussing teaching, MCTE encourages you to stay active in organizations that celebrate the fine work many of us strive to do each day. Please participate when given opportunities to voice your opinion or share your classroom accomplishments with your fellow teachers, administrators, community members, and legislators. Contributing a commentary piece to this newsletter would also be a great way to sound your voice. As Dylan Thomas said, "Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Do what you must to keep your inner and professional light lit.

George Bernard Shaw vs An English Teacher ~ By Tom Weber

Multiple Choice Question: Finish the Quote "He who can, does. He who cannot ..."

- A. ... is unemployed.
- B. ... doesn't.
- C. ... lives at home with parents.
- D. ... teaches.

The correct answer is "D." Teaches. "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches." The quote is attributed to the award winning Irish dramatist, critic, and philosopher George Bernard Shaw. It was first published in 1903 in Shaw's play entitled *Man and Superman*, a literary masterpiece.

The meaning of "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches" is straightforward. The common inference is that people who are failures in the real world workplace can always find refuge in the teaching profession. According to this pedagogical putdown: Those who can't hack it as accountants are better suited as math teachers, those who can't make it as musicians are relegated to teach music class, and those who can't become writers become English teachers.

For over a century, these contemptuous words have reverberated in the academic world. To what specific degree of damage this demeaning academic aphorism has wrought on the teaching community is difficult to judge, but it has definitely done a disservice to the overall reputation of past, present, and future educators.

Teachers should not be off-limits when it comes to criticism. Mr. Shaw has a right to his critical opinion about teachers or any other profession. But why do many look at his dogmatic views as definitive facts? Granted, he's got the credentials to support his opinions, but they are still just opinions.

If Ireland's literary sage has a right to his beliefs about teachers then so do other great writers and thinkers. Helen Caldwell, world renown author and bona-fide genius, writes: "Teachers, I believe, are the most responsible and important members of society because their professional efforts affect the fate of the earth."

Educators still squirm when they hear George Bernard Shaw's famous and infamous quotation "He who can, does. He who cannot, teachers." Since this masterpiece of negativity can't be erased from the annals of literary history, it should instead be rewritten. The rewrite should praise the under-praised. Recognize the under-recognized. Support the under-supported. And, of course, be gender inclusive.

True or False Questions: "Those who can, do, and those who can do more, teach."

The answer is "True."

About Tom Weber: After graduating from the University of Minnesota with a Masters Degree in English Education, Tom Weber started teaching high school English at St. Thomas Academy in Mendota Heights, Minnesota.

During his summer hiatuses, Tom developed his professional writing skills in a variety of writing styles and genres in his continued quest to prove George Bernard Shaw wrong.

Tom is currently living in Burnsville, Minnesota with his wife Sue and their two children.

MCTE News

Minnesota Humanities Center
987 East Ivy Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55106

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Return Service Requested**Inside issue: Spring Conference Registration materials, Journal updates, & Member commentary**

*MCTE News is published four times a year as a benefit to members and is part of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement.
By April 15, please submit articles you'd like to contribute for the next issue to jodi.anderson@anoka.k12.mn.us ~ Thanks!*

Enjoy this poem from the *MCTE Student Writing Issue...now online!*

Laura Posthumus -
St. Michael-Albertville High School

\$19.95 Sestina

Your problem is solved,
it is just so simple
with this new and improved
miracle product
that you have always needed
for just \$19.95!

Let me tell you about it. For just \$19.95
Your slicing and dicing woes are solved.
It comes in a convenient case for when it's needed,
and yet its design is so simple.
It cleans and disinfects any surface, this product.
Its sleek and stylish design has been improved.

Its environmentally friendly formula is improved
and it could be yours for just \$19.95!
Your house will be so inviting with this product;
Your acne issues are solved!
A child could use it; it's that simple.
It will be the only one you'll ever need

This is what you've always needed.
It has been totally improved.
Payment is fast and simple
It's just \$19.95
(plus shipping and handling). Solved
are your organization problems with our new product.

call *now* to get our new product,
and we'll throw in something we couldn't sell and you
never needed!
Your "too much space in the attic" problem is solved
when you buy our "improved"
piece of junk for three payments of \$19.95.
It's just that simple!

Are you watching this, camera guy? The simple
solution is to walk away, but you want this product.
You will pay the five payments of \$19.95
(plus shipping and handling). You needed
that operation, but one look at that improved,
sleek design, and you figure that problem will solve

itself. You sold your soul for \$19.95. It's that simple.
Your problems are not solved. Yet, there's this new product.
It's what you've always needed. They say it's been im-
proved...

Has this inspired you? MCTE's website will be featuring the poetry of teachers in a sidebar called Poetry Corner. If you have a poem you'd like to share, please email it to sjhayes@aol.com. See Larry Gavin's "Ice Fishing At Winter Solstice" online now.