

Tennessee

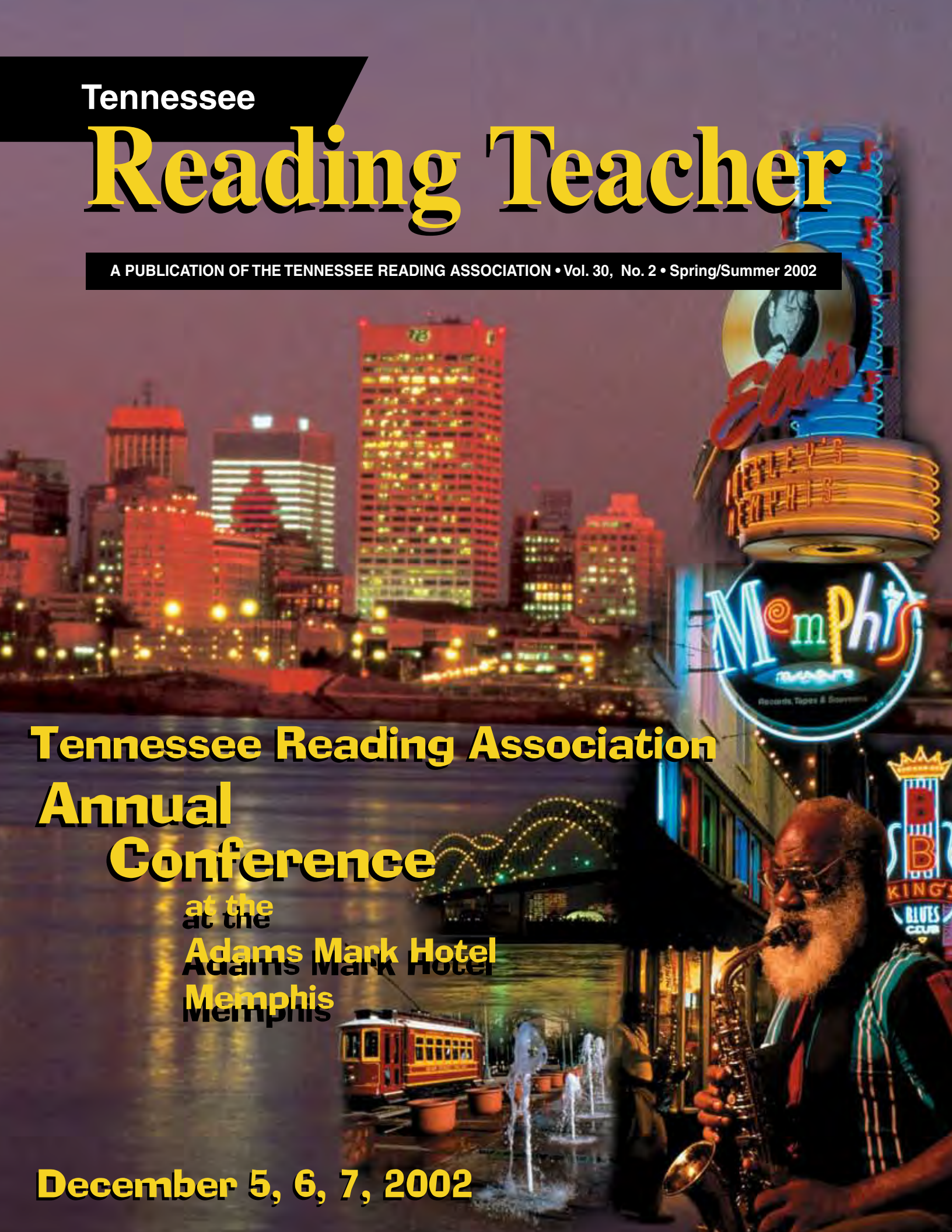
# Reading Teacher

A PUBLICATION OF THE TENNESSEE READING ASSOCIATION • Vol. 30, No. 2 • Spring/Summer 2002

## Tennessee Reading Association Annual Conference

at the  
at the  
Adams Mark Hotel  
Adams Mark Hotel  
Memphis  
Memphis

December 5, 6, 7, 2002



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# Tennessee Reading Teacher

## Journal of the Tennessee Reading Association

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# Tennessee Reading Teacher

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Vol 30, No. 2

Spring/Summer, 2002

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# Teacher Degrees and Student Achievement in Reading: Folkwisdom Revisited

*By William Brozo, Richard Ricard, Jack Cassidy, Shannon Collins, and Debra Coffey*

Not long ago we sat in a large meeting sponsored by the governor of our state discussing ways of reinvigorating the teaching profession. Suggestions such as requiring renewal certificates, changing the compensation structure, extending the contract year, and providing funding for university course work were among those made by the invited educators. When the discussion turned to reading we found ourselves in the middle of the dialogue. Armed with one vital fact, the Southwest, the region of the country where we then all resided, has the smallest percentage of teachers with degrees beyond the bachelors (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996) -and without much premeditation, one of us made the following pronouncement: School districts in this state need to create significant financial and professional incentives for their teachers to earn advanced degrees in reading. *Better trained teachers means higher achieving students!* Never mind that we did not have sources at our fingertips to reference for this “self-evident truth;” our assertion made such good sense no one had the temerity to question it. In fact, the comment received overwhelming approbation from nearly everyone present. When the meeting concluded, some of us lingered to talk with the governor’s representative who urged us to send him any data we had in support of our claim.

The results of the search for these data led us to the development of this article. In it, we attempt to answer a single fundamental question: Is there a clear and positive relationship between advanced degrees in reading and student reading achievement? What we found has left us in a much more informed position than we took before the governor’s discussion group; a position no longer reliant on assumption or folkwisdom but based on documented evidence in the literature and from our own data analysis. Folkwisdom of Teaching

Like any profession, teaching is filled with practices derived from the collective wisdom of its practitioners. A

laudatory perspective of teacher folkwisdom credits teachers with a vast reserve of what Elbaz (1983) called “practical knowledge.” This special teacher knowledge is based on personal and professional experiences, grounded in the urgencies of everyday teaching. Some argue that practical knowledge is rich, substantial, and reliable, giving it parity with research and theoretical knowledge about teaching (Carter, 1990).

Detractors of an over reliance on teacher folkwisdom argue that it creates a teaching culture that is dependent on past practice without thoughtful reflection. Phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1990) asserted that the problem with teacher folkwisdom is that it has a way of “eliminating troublesome inquiries ...replacing truth hard to attain ...and substituting the self-explanatory for the questionable” (p.24).

One educational “given” is that advanced degrees matter. Entire systems of graduate education in the United States are founded on the folkwisdom that as teachers gain advanced knowledge of their profession and practice through the attainment of master’s, specialist, and doctoral degrees, they become more effective. In an effort to move beyond a rationale for this assertion based on practical knowledge or folkwisdom alone, we began by looking at the literature related to teacher degrees and student achievement in reading.

## What Do the Experts Say?

Today, most public school systems reward teachers who obtain advanced degrees with a sizable increase in their base pay. On average, the salary increase for a master’s degree is 11 percent, for a specialist degree, 14 percent, and 17 percent for a doctorate (Odden & Kelley, 1997). Given these facts, it would seem reasonable to expect the impact of advanced training on student achievement would have been thoroughly explored. To our surprise, we found that teacher degrees is a variable given

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scant attention in the school finance and productivity literature. Few research reports are available that shed light on the relationship between teachers' level of training and student achievement, with fewer yet focused on reading.

Klinge and Warrick (1990) found that in districts where more teachers and staff held master's degrees or above, reading test scores were higher. Similar findings were obtained in a study of the impact of South Carolina's Education Improvement Act on student reading achievement. Consistent with these findings are those made by Ferguson (1991), who in his extensive review of the research literature on how and why money matters in public education observed that though few studies are available, they suggest "hiring teachers with stronger literacy skills ... and attracting more teachers with advanced training are... measures that produce higher test scores in exchange for the money (p.485).

Along with these findings in support of teachers with advanced degrees, new evidence has surfaced to suggest teachers with advanced training specifically in reading do make a positive difference in the reading performance of their students (Bean, Cassidy, Grunnet, Quatroche, Swan, & Knaub, 1999; Klein, Monti, Mulcahy-Ernt, & Speck, 1997).

While sources are limited, the work cited here lends support to our claim that teachers with advanced training in the form of graduate degrees and special certifications influence positively student reading achievement.

In the next section, we briefly describe our efforts to discover whether a relationship exists between teacher degrees and student reading achievement based on analysis of available national data sets.

## Locating the Data Sets and Looking for Relationships

Data on our nation's students' reading achievement and teachers' degrees were obtained from convenient sources. Reading Proficiency scores for fourth-graders in the 39 states participating in the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (Miller, Nelson, & Naifeh, 1995) comprised one data set for the student reading achievement variable. Although the newer NAEP reading results from the 1998 testing year are available, they could not be used because no corresponding national data bank exists for teachers during that year. The NAEP report on the analysis of the 1994 test also supplied data on the percentage of NAEP fourth graders taught by teachers with bachelor's, master's, and higher degrees.

In the *Schools and Staffing Survey*, 1993-94 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995), from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the National Education Data Resource Center (NEDRC) we acquired reformulated tables on teacher degrees for each state. Unfortunately, extant government sources do not have information about the major area of study (e.g., reading, math, early childhood, etc.) for teachers during the NAEP Reading testing year of 1994.

In answer to the question of whether or not the training level of teachers really impacted on fourth graders' reading proficiency scores, we found that indeed students taught by bachelor's level teachers scored significantly lower than students taught by master's level trained teachers [212.79 and 214.87 respectively,  $T(39) = 4.19$   $p < .001$ ].

To refine our understanding of this relationship we correlated ranked data of overall teacher training level in the 39 states with fourth-graders reading proficiency scores in those states resulting in a significant, though not robust, Spearman Rho coefficient of .30 ( $p < .035$ ).

The results of our data analysis do lend credence to folkwisdom that reading achievement is impacted positively by teachers who have advanced degrees. While the statistical findings were not as powerful as we had hoped, they were significant and point in the expected direction. It is important to bear in mind that these results were obtained working only with teacher degree type and not the area of specialization; those data are not available from NEDRC.

## Folkwisdom Revisited

So what do we make of the folkwisdom that teachers with advanced degrees will engender higher student reading achievement? We may have spoken to the governor's representative with more confidence than was actually warranted at the time. Clearly, support for the contention that earning advanced degrees is now evident; however, questions linger. Given the many national and state initiatives to enhance reading ability for all students, why haven't the effects on student achievement of teachers' levels of professional education been more thoroughly explored? Does a lack of attention to such a critical variable speak to how most in our field assume a linear relationship between student achievement and teacher degrees? If so, this apparent reliance on folkwisdom may be precisely why accusations that our profession is devoid of scientific rigor and research-based methodologies are made so glibly by those outside our ranks.

In today's climate of high stakes testing and fiscal accountability we need as much ammunition as we can muster to counter the unfounded claims that our work is based less on sound evidence than on practical knowledge and folkwisdom. Our review of the literature and data analysis leaves us hopeful.

We believe that with additional studies like those undertaken by Bean (1999) and Klein (1997) and their collaborators, and with the acquisition of refined information on degree specializations of teachers in the United States, new research evidence will become available to bolster our assertion that teachers need advanced training in reading in order to increase the reading ability of their students. Most importantly, we will be able to better defend the importance of teachers' professional growth achieved through academic scholarship on the basis of hard data, instead of primarily on folkwisdom. Some suggestions in this light are presented below:

Suggestions for Teachers, Administrators, and Others Interested in Fostering Abilities to Promote Literacy

- Enroll in a university graduate reading program
- Enroll in university reading courses even if an advanced degree is not a goal at the present
- Engage in university study leading to reading teacher licensure and/or reading specialist licensure
- Take advantage of university distance learning opportunities
  - Online (Internet) courses
  - Interactive video conferencing
  - Correspondence courses
- Explore literacy training opportunities provided by local education agencies such as affiliates of the International Reading Association
- Be proactive in requesting local school and school system literacy oriented inservices
- Establish or join teacher study groups focused on literacy topics and texts such as articles from professional journals
- Join professional literacy associations
  - Read professional journals published by these associations
  - Attend national, regional, state and local conferences sponsored by the associations
- Take part in learning opportunities provided by publishers of literacy oriented materials for teachers

- Engage in on-line learning hosted by literacy experts

- Attend workshops presented by literacy experts

Information on workshops etc. is made available by literacy-oriented organizations such as the International Reading Association ([www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)) and its local affiliates, for example, the Tennessee Reading Association (<http://plato.ess.tntech.edu/tra/>) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (<http://naeyc.org>)

- Foster mentoring relationships with and frequently observe outstanding reading teachers.

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# A d v e r t i s e

in the

Tennessee

# Reading Teacher

Tennessee Reading Teacher reaches more than 5,000 educators twice each year. This journal welcomes advertisers. The rates are very reasonable. For \$200.00 a full page advertisement will be published, while the cost is \$100.00 for a half page. While reaching many potential consumers, advertising in the Tennessee Reading Teacher helps offset the cost of this publication and supports the Tennessee Reading Association, an organization dedicated to promoting literacy among the people of Tennessee. Please send your ads to:

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# Supporting Young Adolescents' Literacy Learning: A Joint Position Paper of the International Reading Association and National Middle School Association

Released for publication on December 21, 2001

In recent years early reading has received increased attention from policy makers, funding agencies, and educational planners. Young children must get off to a good start in reading; however, it is a serious mistake to assume that a good start is sufficient for producing confident readers. The ability to comprehend a variety of texts, to use sophisticated comprehension and study strategies, to read critically, and to develop a lifelong desire to read are not acquired entirely during the early years. A good start is critical, but not sufficient. Middle school students deserve continued and systematic instruction in reading.

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U.S. readers get off to a fast start but they begin to falter during early adolescence.

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It is during the middle school years that most students refine their reading preferences, become sophisticated readers of informational text and lay the groundwork for the lifelong reading habits they will use in their personal, professional, and civic lives. During the middle school years middle level students can use reading to help answer the profound questions about themselves and the world. With good instruction, ample time, and opportunity to read across a variety of types of text, young adolescents can become successful readers both in and out of the school setting.

International comparisons back this up. They consistently show that U.S. readers get off to a fast

start, but that they begin to falter during early adolescence. A study released by International Educational Achievement (Elley, 1992) involved 200,000 students in 31 nations. United States 9-year-olds were second only to Finland in reading achievement. Fourteen-year-olds in the United States, while still scoring above average, ranked ninth. Similarly, while the fourth- and eighth-grade average scores on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 1999) were stable, the reading scores for 11th-grade students dropped. United States elementary educators do an excellent job of teaching young children to read as measured by international comparisons. However, the data indicate that the level of student performance drops off in the middle- and high school years. This drop in scores must be addressed immediately with all the resources at our disposal. Young adolescents deserve quality reading instruction so they can achieve a level of reading proficiency that will serve them well for the rest of their school careers and beyond.

Therefore, schools serving young adolescents should provide:

- 1. Continuous reading instruction for all young adolescents.** This instruction requires that all middle school teachers understand reading/learning processes, the complexity and diverse needs of young adolescents, and know how to help students develop both the competence and desire to read increasingly complex materials across the curriculum. Reading strategies and skills are central to the success of the integrated, multidisci-

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plinary middle school curriculum, and every teacher must possess the knowledge and skills to integrate reading instruction across the curriculum.

**2. Reading instruction that is individually appropriate.** Young adolescents arrive at middle school with a wide range of individual, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences that have a significant impact on their reading performance. Providing instruction that is appropriate for each student, therefore, requires well-prepared class-

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... schools for young adolescents must have ready access to a wide variety of print and nonprint resources ...

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room teachers who integrate individualized reading instruction within their content areas. This also requires reading specialists who can help their colleagues acquire skills and techniques for delivering developmentally appropriate reading instruction in their content areas. Reading specialists are also necessary for providing intervention programs for struggling readers.

**3. Assessment that informs instruction.** Assessment plans and measures must show learners their strengths as well as their needs. The measures should help guide their teachers in designing instruction that will best help them grow in reading proficiency.

Large-scale assessment programs that focus on comparisons of student groups across districts, states and provinces, and nations are not sufficient. Adequate assessment measures must be supported by strong informal reading assessments that take place in classrooms and involve both teachers and students in the process. These plans must be used to shape and reshape instruction so that it meets the needs of all students.

**4. Ample opportunities to read and discuss reading with others.** To achieve this goal, schools for young adolescents must have ready access to a wide variety of print and nonprint resources that will foster in students independence, confidence, and a lifelong desire to read. Because middle school students are a diverse group, care must be taken to include material that will appeal to linguistically and culturally diverse students. Librarians and media specialists are important partners who can ensure access for all adolescents. All school-based professionals must have sufficient knowledge of reading materials to provide guidance for adolescents in selecting reading materials.

Students must have many opportunities to choose reading materials that are interesting and engaging. School-based professionals should model reading in various forms, have a love of reading, and possess the skills needed to help student progress toward mastery in all aspects of reading.

#### Call to Action

IRA and NMSA, because of the importance of reading and literacy, urge classroom teachers, school-based educators, educational policy makers, and family and community members to take the following actions to improve the literacy performance of all middle level students.

#### Specifically, classroom teachers should:

- Engage in whole-school planning to implement components of a successful school- or district-wide literacy learning plan that is integrative and interdisciplinary.
- Collaborate with administrators, librarians, guidance counselors, intervention specialists, and other school-based educators to improve reading instruction and achievement.
- Interpret assessment data and make information available to other teachers and school-based educators.
- Provide opportunities for students to read material they choose and for students to be read to each school day.

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**State/district leaders and policy makers should:**

- Provide needed funding for schools to implement high-quality literacy programs in their school.
- Provide needed funding to ensure that all young adolescents are surrounded in their classroom and school libraries by a plethora of new, interesting, and diverse reading materials.
- Provide funding for staff development of all school personnel so that they understand how to integrate reading instruction across content areas and school settings.
- Work to enact legislation that will further school- and district-wide efforts to improve student reading achievement.
- Provide mentoring opportunities for new teachers so they can learn ways of supporting young adolescent literacy learning.

**School-based educators should:**

- Become knowledgeable about literacy learning.
- Provide professional development opportunities so all teachers are able to facilitate literacy learning in all curricular areas.
- Provide modeling and coaching to introduce new instructional strategies for integrating reading instruction across all subjects.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to read to students during the school day. Guide students in selecting books to read and provide for authentic multiple opportunities to respond in writing to texts.

- Know what to look for in good literacy learning classrooms.
- Coordinate efforts for improved literacy learning in schools and districts.
- Integrate literacy throughout the curriculum, recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of reading instruction.

**Teacher educators should:**

- Provide both preservice and inservice teachers with an understanding of the literacy learning process, a repertoire of strategies for enhancing learning in the content areas, and methods for improving vocabulary development.
- In partnership with schools, provide professional development opportunities for all teachers to become expert reading instructors in their content areas.
- Model good reading instructional practices in their college and university classrooms.

**Families and community members should:**

- Be positive role models for reading and writing.
- Provide an abundance of reading materials and exhibit a positive attitude about reading and writing.
- Encourage young adolescents to read.
- Be engaged as partners with the school in the academic lives of adolescents.

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# Come to Memphis and Rock and Roll into Reading

**At the Annual Tennessee Reading Association Conference  
December 5-7, 2002**

Teachers and administrators, begin planning now to attend the annual Tennessee Reading Association Conference to be held December 5-7, 2002, in Memphis at the luxurious Adam's Mark Hotel. Enjoy such authors as John



Angela Shelf Medearis

Archebald, David Plummer, Angela Shelf Medearis, Kim Johnson, and Rick Duval. There will be many entertaining and highly informative sessions to enhance your classroom experiences. Learn the latest information on "high stakes" testing and reading/language arts standards. In addition, sessions with a particular focus for school and reading program administrators will be presented. Marie Draper, an internationally acclaimed motivational speaker, will address conference participants. The widely heralded singing group, the Associates, will entertain and inspire all in attendance, as well.

You will have wonderful opportunities to interact with teachers and school leaders from all over Tennessee and surrounding states. There will be a number of make-and-take sessions, author signings, an author's luncheon featuring award-winning author Angela Shelf Medearis, and an author's breakfast. Further, we are planning transportation to near-by Beale Street for a night of blues, a trip to Tunica for those who love the one-arm bandits, more music, and possibly a trip to Graceland.



Marie Draper

Do not miss the fun, excitement, and true friendships that are always part of the Tennessee Reading Association annual meeting. See you in Memphis!

**If you have any questions please feel welcome to e-mail Randy Kincaid:  
randy@sevier.org or call Randy at (865) 453-4671.**

# Registration Form

## Tennessee Reading Association Conference

### December 5-7, 2002, in Memphis, Tennessee

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (     ) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Local Council Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Preregistration Payment Deadline: October 25, 2002**

**TRA Member**

Full Conference (Thursday, Friday, & Saturday Drive-In) ..... \$80.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Thursday/Friday Only ..... \$60.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Drive-In Saturday Only ..... \$30.00 \_\_\_\_\_

\*Drive-in Saturday includes a performance by renowned group the Associates, continental breakfast, and break out sessions for teachers, administrators, and reading specialists.

**Non Member**

Full Conference (Thursday, Friday, & Saturday) ..... \$95.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Thursday/Friday Only ..... \$75.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Drive-In Saturday Only ..... \$45.00 \_\_\_\_\_

\*Drive-in includes a performance by renowned group The Associates and continental breakfast.

**Full-Time Student (Please send copy of current ID)**

Full Conference (Thursday, Friday, & Saturday) ..... \$65.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Thursday/Friday Only ..... \$45.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Drive-In Saturday Only ..... \$30.00 \_\_\_\_\_

\*Drive-in includes a performance by renowned group The Associates and continental breakfast.

**Ticket Required For:**

K-2 Make and Take Workshop (Thursday) ..... FREE \_\_\_\_\_  
 3-8 Make and Take Workshop (Thursday) ..... FREE \_\_\_\_\_  
 Author's Luncheon (Thursday), *Featuring Angela Medearis* ..... \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Author's Breakfast (Friday) ..... \$20.00 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bus Trip to Tunica (Thursday p.m.) ..... \$8.00 \_\_\_\_\_

\*A \$10 voucher will be given to you upon arrival in Tunica to spend as you wish.

Bus Trip to Beale Street (Friday p.m.) ..... \$8.00 \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL: \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Mail registration form and checks payable to Tennessee Reading Association to:

**Tonja O'Dell, 2980 Douglas Dam Rd., Kodak, TN 37764**

**Refunds of pre-registration fees must be requested by 25 October 2002**

**A \$10 administrative fee will be charged for all refunds.**

**On-site registration will cost \$15 more for the full conference, \$10 more for Thursday and Friday, and \$5 more for the Saturday Drive-In Conference.**

**Tennessee Reading Association**  
**Conference Overview**  
**December 5-7, 2002**  
*Adams Mark Hotel in Memphis*

**Wednesday, December 4**

Registration ..... 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

**Thursday, December 5**

Registration ..... 7a.m - 3:00 p.m.

**General Session #1** ..... 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.

Break ..... 10:00 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

**Concurrent Sessions** ..... 10:15 - 12:00 p.m.

Exhibits ..... 12:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Author's Luncheon ..... 12:15 - 1:15 p.m.

Authors signing books in exhibit hall throughout the day

**Concurrent Sessions** ..... 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

\*Bus for Tunica leaves at 6:00 p.m.

**Friday, December 6**

Registration ..... 8 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Exhibits ..... 8 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Author's Breakfast ..... 9 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

**Concurrent Sessions** ..... 9:00 a.m. - 10:50a.m.

Break ..... 10:50 - 11:00 a.m.

**General Session #2.** ..... 11:00 - 12:00 noon

Lunch Break ..... 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

(Lunch on your own)

**Concurrent Sessions** ..... 3:30 - 4:40 p.m.

Author signings ..... 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.

(Exhibit Hall)

**Concurrent Sessions** ..... 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

\*Bus trips to Beale Street

every hour from 6:00 p.m. until midnight

**Saturday, December 7**

Free continental breakfast 7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

Registration: ..... 7:30 - 8:30 a.m.

**General Session #3** ..... 8:30 - 9:30 a.m.

Featuring Marie Draper and The Associates

**Concurrent Session** with

State Department personnel .9:40 - 11:30 a.m.



**Adams Mark Hotel**  
**Memphis, Tennessee**

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## **Rock and Roll Into Reading**

### **Tennessee Reading Association Conference**

**December 5-7, 2002**

**Adam's Mark Hotel • 939 Ridge Lake Boulevard • Memphis, TN 38120**  
**(901) 684-6664 or (800) 444-ADAM**

Directions from the Airport Or Call Hotel Shuttle at (901) 684-6664  
Take I-240 Eastbound (Nashville).  
Take Exit 15 (Poplar Avenue/Germantown) left.  
Take left at first light (Sweetbriar) and go under overpass.  
Take first left at left-turn arrow (Ridgelake Blvd.)  
The Hotel will be on your left.

Directions from the East (Nashville):  
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Take first left at left-turn arrow (Ridgelake Blvd.)  
The Hotel will be on your left.

Directions from the West (Little Rock):  
Take I-40 to I-240 Eastbound (Nashville).  
Take Exit 15 (Poplar Avenue/Germantown) left.  
Take left at first light (Sweetbriar) and go under overpass.  
Take first left at left-turn arrow (Ridgelake Blvd.)  
The Hotel will be on your left.

Directions from the South (Mississippi):  
Take I-55 to I-240 Eastbound (Nashville).  
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Take left at first light (Sweetbriar) and go under overpass.  
Take first left at left-turn arrow (Ridgelake Blvd.)  
The Hotel will be on your left.

Directions from the North (Covington):  
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**CALL FOR PROPOSALS**  
**Tennessee Reading Association Annual Conference**  
**December 5-7, 2002 • Adam's Mark Hotel in Memphis, TN**

**Mail completed *Call for Proposals* no later than June 15, 2002 to:**  
**Randall Kincaid, 226 Cedar St., Sevierville, TN 37862 • E-mail: randy@sevier.org**

**TITLE OF PRESENTATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Presenter(s):**

|                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Name (First, Last) | Name (First, Last) |
| Name (First, Last) | Name (First, Last) |
| Name (First, Last) | Name (First, Last) |

**Biographical Information:** Please prepare a 2 or 3 sentence summary for each presenter as you would like it to appear in the conference program and for facilitator use. This might include the name of your school, particular teaching interests, and anecdotal information concerning the presentation.

**Abstract:** Please attach a short description (2 or 3 sentences) about your presentation, as you would like it to appear in the conference program.

**Check Desired Presentation Length** \_\_\_\_\_ 60 Min. \_\_\_\_\_ 90 Min.

**Presentation Format: (Please check only one.)**

|  |   |   |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Panel Discussion      | <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstration & Audience Participation |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Workshop              | <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture Presentation                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Performance Presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Describe _____ |   |   |

**Intended Audience: (Check all that apply.)**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-K Educators                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary Educators                |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Title 1 Educators                | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Educators                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adult Educators                  | <input type="checkbox"/> English Language Learners Educators |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others _____                     |  |

**Audio-Visual Needs:** Multimedia resources will be the responsibility of the presenter, along with presentation handouts. No additional copies can be made available. Overhead projectors will be available.

**PROPOSAL SUBMITTED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to act as a session facilitator? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

Program confirmations will be sent by October 1, 2002. Upon confirmation of your proposal, please be prepared to mail/fax one copy of handouts you plan to provide to your audience members. Presenters, however, are required to make handouts for their own sessions.

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# Durable, Dependable, But Not Drudgery: The ABC's

By Ann Porter Gifford and Gale McMahan

This annotated bibliography provides teachers and others who work with students at various emerging literary stages a synthesis of available alphabet books. ABC, acrostic, and alliteration alphabet books are listed with ideas of how to integrate each book across content areas for specific grade levels.

The case for using various kinds of alphabet books to help meet the literacy needs of today's students is a compelling one. Students must have a broad background in a variety of areas in order to connect between what they know and what they are learning. To provide the necessary background, alphabet books have been found to be helpful to students in accumulating vocabulary, concepts, experiences, and background knowledge.

At the preschool and primary levels reading aloud alliterative stories or alphabet books will help students to learn the names of the letters, perceive the concept of beginning sounds, learn and make the sounds of beginning consonants, and reinforce the use of beginning consonants. At the middle or upper grade levels, as well as, the university level, the alphabet books are challenging and set the stage for the development of critical and higher-order thinking skills. Alphabet books continue to have a positive impact at all the stages of reading development.

To assist you in selecting books for your students, lists of various alphabet books are presented below:

- Aylesworth, J. (1992). *The folks in the valley: A Pennsylvania Dutch ABC*. New York: Harper Collins. Each letter has its own page with both the capital and lower case letter appearing in a bold clear print at the top of the page. What makes this book unique is Aylesworth's ability to compose an appropriate rhyme for each letter of the alphabet about the people and activities of a rural Pennsylvania Dutch settlement. Each picture has a border that is representative of Pennsylvania Dutch art. Although definitely designed for the preschool through first grade audience, it provides wonderful research opportunities for upper social studies students.
- Boynton, S. (1987). *A is for angry: An animal and adjective alphabet*. New York: Workman. This book is designed to use an adjective to describe an animal for each letter of the alphabet. Most of the animals are well known; however, the "u" is represented by an upside-down unau. There is a vain vulture, a tangled turkey, rotund rhinoceros and outraged opossum.
- Calmenson, S. (1994). *It begins with an A*. New York: Scholastic. This alphabet riddle book with a four-picture page format repeats the question, "What is it?" This question appears at the bottom of each page after a rhyming couplet has given the clues to the reader. For example, "You spread this on cake. It is something you eat. It begins with an I. Taste it—it's sweet! What is it?"
- Cassie, B. & Pallotta, J. (1995). *The butterfly alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. (Originally published in 1953) This appears to be the initial book that started Jerry Pallotta on his successful ABC book writing career. Who wouldn't want a book that tells about these beautiful delicate-winged creatures?
- DeGezelle, T. (1995). *Birds a to z*. Mankato, MN: Capstone Curriculum. This is the solution to include nonfiction material in your primary grades. This scientifically accurate alphabet book introduces the world of birds through photographs and facts. In the appendix there are many Internet sites listed for further exploration about birds. They also give suggested tips for teachers and parents, other books about birds and a useful glossary.
- Der Manuelian, P. (1991). *Hieroglyphs from A to Z: A rhyming book with ancient Egyptian stencils for kids*. New York: Scholastic. This is a book everyone will want in their personal library because of the artistic beauty found in the borders accompanying each letter of the alphabet. In addition to the large colored hieroglyph showing a picture of a word that begins with the letter, it has a smaller hieroglyph that stands for the sound our English letter makes. The hieroglyphs are beautiful reproductions of actual ancient carvings.

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and paintings found on the Egyptian tomb and temple walls. Also in the back of the book is a brief history of hieroglyphs and a chart matching the hieroglyphs to our alphabet.

Downie, J. (1988). *Alphabet Puzzle*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books. Downie, in her first book, cleverly challenges both children and adults to guess how every other letter will be represented. This is done by cutting a three-inch square hole that appears to be a picture frame. It reveals what appears to be a repeat of the previous letter. For example, the letter c is represented by camel and you see the next page with the text, "Dd is for ?". The picture revealed in the three inch square appears to be many camels, but when you turn the page there is only one camel standing in a desert. The optical illusion was developed with mounds of sand that previously appeared to be humps of many camels. This is the type of optical illusion that is created throughout the book. This is a good book to stretch the mind and allow for predictions, hypothesis and critical thinking.

Fain, K. (1993). *Handsigns: A sign language alphabet*. This book teaches the American Manual Alphabet. The animals portrayed on each page have the accompanying letter-sign representing the first letter in its name. This book also gives a short history of manual speech. It also has a glossary of the animals' pictures, which is helpful since not all the animals selected are well known; i.e., lynx, nautilus, urchin, vixen, and xenosaur.

Gag, W. (1961, 1933). *The abc bunny*. New York: Scholastic. This Newbery Honor Book, written in couplet with an accompanying song composed by the author's sister, is a family treasure. The artistic detail in this book is very typical of the other award-winning books by Wanda Gag.

Hudson, C.W. (1987). *Afro-Bets ABC book*. East Orange, NJ: Just Us Books. There are six African-American children who cleverly form each letter with their bodies. Also listed on each letter page are other key words and pictures.

Hudson, W. (1988). *Afro-Bets book of black heroes from A to Z*. Orange, NJ: Just Us Books. Each page has a photograph approximately 3" by 4" and vital statistics of a famous black hero who has overcome great obstacles to make a significant contribution to society.

Johnson, S.T. (1995). *Alphabet city*. New York: Viking. Stephen Johnson states in his introduction that he wishes to "inspire children and adults to look at their

surroundings in a fresh and playful way." He hopes people will discover the joy of their urban existence and transcend "the mundane and unearth its hidden beauty." The only self-imposed guidelines were that all letters must be found in natural positions and must all be capital letters. This book provides immeasurable opportunities for exploration for early elementary students as they are becoming familiar with the alphabet, and opportunities for older students to expand their minds artistically. This book provides one with the most wonderful possibility of examining our world from a different perspective. This Caldecott Winner is a must for all libraries.

Jonah, A. (1990). *Aardvarks, disembark*. New York: Scholastic. Wanting to integrate your science and social studies into your communication arts? Then, this is the book to have. It starts out telling of the flood and ark on Mount Ararat. Noah announces for the animals to disembark as he calls out their names in alphabetical order. When he gets to zebras there are still many animals on the ark. He announces for everyone to disembark. They do and we see a detailed picture of all these animals that are either endangered or extinct. As Noah walks down the mountain and passes these animals we are able to see detailed watercolor drawings of each pair of animals with their name printed under their picture for easy identification. An index with all the animals is provided. It also includes a pronunciation key and brief description of the endangered or extinct animals.

Kaye, B., Wise, F. & Lippman, S. (1996). *A you're adorable*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. This familiar song is presented as children and pets climb over, under and through the letters of the alphabet.

Kitamura, S. (1992). *From acorn to zoo and everything in between in alphabetical order*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. A first rate abecedarium with over 400 words vividly illustrated that intertwine on the page to form a colorful and meaningful collage. On the lower part of each page there appears a question in alliteration form; for example: "With what feathered friend does frog share his fruit?"

Lear, E., Illustrated by Lacombe, J. (1992). *A was once an apple pie*. New York: Scholastic. Lear has fun with his rhyming words that are sometimes real and at other times imaginary. If you are into word families this is the book for you. "F f, F was once a little fish, Fishy, Wishy, Squishy, Fishy, In a dishy, Little fish. G g, G was once a little goose, Goosy, Moosy, Boosey, Goosey, Waddy woosy, Little goose."

- Lionni, L. (1968). *The alphabet tree*. New York: Trumpet Club. Bruno Bettelheim stated, “*The alphabet tree* shows rather than tells what literacy is all about.” Although it is not a true alphabet book, the potency of this book requires it to be included. The letters of the alphabet play happily on the tree until a big wind blows them and they become very frightened and hide. A bee comes along and suggests they make words. They do and become resistant to the power of the wind. A caterpillar suggests “Why don’t you get together and make sentences—and mean something?” They create “PEACE ON EARTH AND GOODWILL TOWARD ALL MEN” and this necessitates another adventure. The opportunities for the use of this book is unlimited. It has such potential for use in the upper grades to develop creative and critical thinking. What is the message they want to create and where must it be delivered?
- Lobel, A. (1981). *On market street*. New York: Greenwillow Books. This Caldecott Honor Book with Anita Lobel’s illustrations delights children every time it is shared. There is so much for the eyes to examine in each picture. Although it only has the one capital letter and one word on each page there is still plenty of opportunity to spend time exploring the detailed pictures.
- Lyne, A. (1997). *A my name is ... Dallas, TX*: Whispering Coyote Press. The pattern established on each page of this book would be easy for students to follow. The pattern is “My name is A ..., My best friend’s name is A ..., We live in A ..., And we sell A. ... The book provides a balance between using boy and girl names as the lead person and best friend. They also have a variety of geographical locations from around the world as the location where they live.
- McPhail, D. (1989). *Animals A to Z*. New York: Scholastic. Half of the featured alphabet letters contain pictures and names of two or more animals, one large and the other small. Students will have fun discovering other objects in the picture that start with the special letter.
- MacDonald, S. (1986). *Alphabatics*. New York: Bradbury Press. This Caldecott Honor Book offers each letter of the alphabet a two-page spread where the letter transforms itself into the word it represents. *Alphabatics* is visually attractive with a creative approach to the alphabet.
- Martin, C. (1992). *A Yellowstone ABC*. Niwot, Colorado: Robert Rinehart. This book, written in couplets, provides the reader with detailed information on the Yellowstone National Park. In addition to the information contained in the text, there is a detailed glossary.
- Pallotta, J., Stillwell, F., & Bolster, R. (1997). *The airplane alphabet book*. New York: Scholastic. This book is the perfect match for the young person whose hobby is model airplanes or for the history buff who enjoys aviation history. Who would have thought that in an airplane alphabet book there would have been two important words that started with Q.
- Pallotta, J. (1994). *The desert alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. Although this is an alphabet book, it includes factual information that is sophisticated. This is a Reading Rainbow Book. This is certainly an appropriate book to add to both your science and social studies collection.
- Pallotta, J. (1991). *The dinosaur alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. For students who are connoisseurs of dinosaur knowledge they will definitely want to add this book to their collection. This thoroughly researched book would be effective for a wide range of readers. It might serve as an effective research model for upper and middle school students, as well as an enjoyable “listen to” book for preschool and early primary school students.
- Pallotta, J. (1993). *The extinct alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. Even if one was not interested in expanding their mind through learning about extinct creatures of our world, it would be difficult not to be impressed with the detailed oil painted illustrations that accompany each description.
- Pallotta, J. (1988). *The flower alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. It is not necessary to be a flower lover to enjoy this book because in addition to the information about each kind of flower there are intricate borders that relate to history and world cultures. The glossary furnishes us with author’s notes which add extra information about each flower.
- Pallotta, J. (1996). *The freshwater alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. Although a student of ichthyology may know many of these fish, the author Jerry Pallotta gives credit to two groups of elementary students in Pennsylvania as the discoverer of the quillback which is used to represent the letter q.
- Pallotta, J. (1990). *The frog alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. It might be difficult to select which is your favorite frog when one has such a wide variety from which to select, e.g., goliath frog, hell-

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- bender, dumpy-green tree frog, midwife toad, Yosemite toad and blue-legged, strawberry frog. Whoever said that studying frogs and toads couldn't be exciting has never had the pleasure of this Jerry Pallotta book.
- Pallotta, J. Illustrated by Evans, L. (1994). *The spice alphabet book: herbs, spices, and other natural flavors*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. As with all of the Pallotta books, much research has gone into preparing this book. Students would be fascinated to learn that one of their favorite drinks, Coca-Cola, was flavored with an extract that came from Kola nuts grown in tropical Africa.
- Pallotta, J. Illustrated by Stewart, E. (1991). *The underwater alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. This will be a valuable reference book for students interested in marine life.
- Pallotta, J. (1989). *The yucky reptile alphabet book*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. Each letter of the alphabet is describing a reptile. This will run the gamut from the Armadillo lizard to *Xantusia riversiana* and yellow-headed gecko. We are informed that there are four living orders of reptiles: crocodylia (crocodiles, alligators, caimans and gavials), testudines (turtles), squamata (snakes, lizards, and amphibians) and rynchocephalia (tuatara).
- Pelletier, D. (1996). *The graphic alphabet*. New York: Orchard. Pelletier, a graphic designer, wanted his computer-generated pictures to retain the "natural shape of the letter as well as represent the meaning of the word." This Caldecott Honor Book effectively conveys the meaning of the key word as depicted with the A letter that stands for an avalanche. He cleverly has the right side of the letter chipping off to form an avalanche. Some teachers may have a justified argument to the value of this book for teaching the alphabet because the "g, n, r, and u" are not made correctly. Also, the author failed to consistently use either all upper or lower case letters throughout the book. This may cause some confusion for emerging literacy stages, but from the perspective of stretching the mind about the alphabet, this book challenges you to rethink the alphabet visually.
- Rankin, L. (1991). *The handmade alphabet*. New York: Scholastic. This unusual book reveals the manual alphabet used by the American Sign Language for those who are deaf and select signing as one of their forms of communicating. This book has personal significance to the author/illustrator since her older stepson is deaf. The delicate, detailed illustrations are colored pencil drawings on charcoal paper.
- Reasoner, C. (1998). *Alphabite! A funny feast from A to Z*. New York: Price Stern Sloan. Each letter of the alphabet is represented by a picture of colorful edible food. The reader immediately notes that someone has taken a bite out of each food item. The book starts with "someone ate apples, tart and red ... then took a big bite of banana bread ..." It continues through the letters arriving with an unusual twist as to who the culprit is.
- Sabuda, R. (1994). *The Christmas alphabet*. New York: Orchard Books. For all teachers who enjoy sharing origami with your classes this has unlimited possibilities. This pop-up alphabet books combines the wonder of Christmas and paper sculptures as twenty-six seasonal surprises are revealed behind each door.
- Shannon, G. (1996). *Tomorrow's Alphabet*. New York: Scholastic. The two-page spread for each letter of the alphabet introduces us to what will develop tomorrow; for example, the A is to seed tomorrow's APPLE or G is for bulbs in tomorrow's GARDEN.
- Strickland, P. (1995). *ABC bouncy boxes and board book*. New York: Anytime Books. This unique package has two parts. The traditional board book with each page containing two letters of the alphabet which are represented by a single large size object with the word printed in bold under the picture. The second part of this book is a box with the same pictures representing the alphabet, but these are imprinted on a box that folds flat inside the bookcase and instantly pops up into an ABC letter block.
- Urdike, J. (1995). *A helpful alphabet of friendly objects*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. The familiar words are placed in poetic form with a carefully sculptured picture provided by David Urdike, John Urdike's son. The words that are selected to represent each letter of the alphabet are sure to please young readers because they are common elements such as hubcaps, garbage cans, umbrella, vacuum cleaner, window, xylophone, you and zero. The pictures all involve children and are sure to hit a resounding chord with young readers.
- Walton, R. & Miglio, P. (1998). *So many bunnies: A bedtime abc and counting book*. New York: Scholastic. A clever counting book that introduces the alphabet with the names of each bunny. This loving tale is based on the familiar nursery of Old Mother Hubbard. In contrast wise Mother Rabbit knows what to do. "She

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fed them some carrots, some broth, and some bread, then kissed them all gently and put them to bed. **I** was **Able**. He slept on the table.” The tale continues counting up to twenty-six with each child having a name that rhymes with the sleeping location. Students respond well to the combination of rhyme, abc and counting book.

Wilbur, R. Illustrated by Diaz, D. (1997). *The disappearing alphabet*. New York: Scholastic. What would happen if some of the letters of the alphabet started to disappear? If **a** disappeared we would not have hay for cows to eat, and instead it would be **hy**. They could not get enough nutrition from that. Caldecott Honor Book.

### Acrostic Alphabet Books

Schnur, S. (1997). *Autumn: An alphabet acrostic*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. Key autumn words with the text explaining key concepts are written vertically after each letter. The first letter of each acrostic is used to place the pages in alphabetical order. This acrostic style is very rarely found which makes this book all the more enjoyable.

Schnur, S. Illustrated by L. Evans. (1999). *Spring: An alphabet acrostic*. New York: Clarion. The hand-colored linoleum cuts add to this well designed acrostic abc poetry book. The ability of Schnur to add another dimension to the typical abc book gives this book much potential for all ages.

### Alliteration in Alphabet Books

Base, G. (1987). *Animalia*. New York: Harry N. Abrams. This book wins the hearts and minds of all ages of students. The first time a group of university students saw this book they would not put it down and were enthralled with its details and kept returning to examine it. Young children find the detailed drawings with the many hidden or partially submerged pictures equally inviting for hours of browsing. The alliteration that is found on each page is unbelievable. “Beautiful blue butterflies basking by a babbling brook” and “proud peacocks preening perfect plumage,” are two of the excellent alliterations one finds in this book.

Bayer, J. (1984). *A my name is Alice*. New York: Dial. This book won the Child Study Association Children’s Books of the Year, the IRA-CBC Children’s Choices, and the Parents’ Choice Award for Illustrations. Children who have the good fortune of having this book in their hands rate it a winner. In the author’s notes we learn this book came from a playground chant she remembered from grammar school. This book ties in geography and the study of various occupations. Steven

Kellogg’s humorous illustrations are sure to have you picking this book up to share again and again.

Dragonwagon, C. (1992). *Alligator arrived with apples: A potluck alphabet feast*. New York: Aladdin Books. This delightful alliteration book certainly places a new twist on the regular Thanksgiving feast. Everyone provides some food for the feast, e.g., “alligator arrived with apples and allspice while yams and yogurt were yielded by yak and zebra zipped over a zaftig zucchini.”

Kellogg, S. (1987). *Aster Aardvark’s alphabet adventures*. New York: Mulberry Books. What a challenging tongue twisting adventure one has as they trip their tongue lightly over all these alliterations. The pictures add much detail as Aster Aardvark winds in and out of these alliterative narrative adventures. This book can certainly be enjoyed from preschool to university level.

Lobel, A. (1994). *Away from home*. New York: Scholastic. This book gives us an opportunity to travel around the world and meet different students as they perform on stage with the backdrop showing the scenery of the various countries. How exciting to see that “Adam arrived in Amsterdam while Frederick fiddled in Florence and Zachary zigzagged in Zaandam” (Holland). For the students reading the book that might need a little refresher course in geography, the glossary provides them with information about the city and country and some of the famous and well-known local landmarks.

Lobel, A. (1995). *Alison’s Zinnia*. New York: Greenwillow. Alliteration is used in this irresistible alphabet book. This has a wonderful pattern for older children to try to replicate because one letter leads into the next. “Alison acquired an amaryllis for Beryl. Beryl bought a begonia for Crystal.” Every flower lover will feel this is a must for their bookshelf.

Shelby, A. (1991). *Potluck*. New York: Orchard Books. A multicultural, potluck dinner is being hosted by Alpha and Betty. Their friends arrive with appropriate alphabetical food. “Acton appeared with asparagus soup. Quincy, of course brought quiche. Zeke and Zelda zoomed in with zucchini casserole.” This is a must own book because it has children from various cultures sharing their native food.

Steig, J. (1992). *Alpha beta chowder*. New York: Harper Collins. This ABC poetry book contains many poems written in alliteration. I is represented with the poem Intolerance. “Iggledy-piggledy, Ivan the Terrible said,

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'I'm inclined to be irksome, it's true. Anything triggers my irascibility-infants, for instance, or gum on my shoe.'" Another wonderful quality about this book is the illustrations done by Caldecott Award Winning author and illustrator, William Steig.

Walker, J. (1995). *Ridiculous rhymes from A to Z*. New York: A Bill Martin Book, Henry Holt. This poetic book written in alliteration has divided the page horizontally into fourths. Enjoying this two-page spread with R "Rachel's royal rhinestone robe, a rocket to the stars repairing refrigerator – all begins with Rs. A rhino in a rubber raft rowing down the Rhine. A record rainstorm in a room – I'm glad that it's not mine. A rat ran up the ranger tower, then he ran right through it. R is for roaring raccoons – there are only two that do it. A restaurant's favorite recipe is rattlesnakes on rice. The real reindeer that serve rootbeer are also very nice. The rough and rowdy rock-'n'-rollin' rabbits on the air and the rooster on the radio says Rs are everywhere."

Weaver, D. (1992). *Arizona A to Z*. Flagstaff, AZ: Northland. Although your primary children will enjoy hearing this book read, it is listed as juvenile literature. This book has a wealth of historical information about the state of Arizona. It is very cleverly written in alliteration. "Antelope approaching an ancient adobe, Bighorn bounding by brittlebush, and

Yucca yellowing in Yuma." Both your ears and your eyes are delighted by this mother-daughter creation.

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Ann Porter Gifford is an Associate Professor in the Department of Elementary, Early and Special Education at Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau, MO. Prior to taking this position she had taught in the public schools in California, Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri. Dr. Gifford is also president of the Missouri Council of the International Reading Association. She may be contacted through e-mail [apgifford@semo.edu](mailto:apgifford@semo.edu) or 573-651-2405.

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Gale McMahan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Elementary, Early and Special Education at Southeast Missouri State University. Prior to taking this position she was a public school teacher for 23 years and has been a principal and superintendent in the Illinois Public Schools. Dr. McMahan is active at both the state and national area in her specialty area of Special Education. In addition she has been an active member and supporter of the International Reading Association where she has served as President of the local chapter. She may be reached at 573-651-2442.

## TRA Legislative Action Team Honored

Congratulations are in order for Sharon Lassiter and Legislative Action Team. The Tennessee Reading Association received the International Reading Association's Advocacy Award for 2001-2002. Materials were collected, submitted, and reviewed for consideration at International Reading Association headquarters in Newark, Delaware.

Sharon's committee has been extremely active and is certainly deserving of this special recognition. The Advocacy Award and ribbon will be presented during the IRA Annual Convention on Tuesday, April 30 at 2:00 p.m. at the Hilton San Francisco, Franciscan Room C.

# Cheryl Byrd Zach: A Tennessee English Teacher Turned Author Extraordinaire

A Tennessean, former teacher, and proud grandmother, Cheryl Byrd Zach, a resident of Franklin, is the author of more than 40 books. Cheryl was born in Clarksville and spent her early years in Stewart County, where she went to school in a two-room school and “had a great teacher.” Her father was a career military man, and as a result the family moved frequently. Cheryl says that in twelve years she went to 10 schools. She has lived in Georgia, Gulf-coast Mississippi, Texas, California, Germany, and Scotland, as well as Tennessee. Despite all the moves, Cheryl was a good student with writing talent. She was even a National Merit Scholar.

Cheryl’s father was often absent from the home – away on assignment – and her mother was for a while isolated from the family because of tuberculosis. These parental absences and the frequent moves, leaving behind friends, probably contributed to her early love of reading – and of writing. She wrote poems, stories, and plays as she grew up, and later she won writing awards as an Austin Peay undergraduate.

Cheryl married, finished her B.A. degree in English from Austin Peay State University, taught a year in Mississippi, and then went to Scotland for a little over three years. As time passed, she had two children (a boy and a girl), earned an M.A. degree in English from Austin Peay,

and taught high school English in Dyersburg, Tennessee, from 1978-1982. During this time she was divorced. All along she continued to write when she had time.

Teachers had told her she had a talent for writing, but although she had taken many good creative writing classes in school, none taught her about the business of being a writer. After years of trying to squeeze writing into her life among myriad other activities, she was spurred to try writing full-time by a writing conference at Vanderbilt University in the late 1970s.

In 1982 Cheryl re-married and moved to California with her new husband. At this time she gave herself one year to succeed as a full-time writer. She sold her first book, a romance titled *Twice a Fool*, thirteen months later. It was published by Harlequin in 1984 and made the Waldenbooks’ romance best-seller list, but category romance didn’t seem to fit her topics and style, so she had begun to write books about teens, which were marketed as young adult romances. Quite accidentally, her first young adult novel, *The Frog Princess*, was published by Silhouette nearly simultaneously with the publication of *Twice a*

*Fool*. This book was followed by a long string of successful young adult books with many awards. In fact, that career-defining early book, *The Frog Princess*, was an award-winner, receiving a Golden Medallion Award



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from Romance Writers of America (RWA). She also wrote some middle-grade novels for children.

Among Cheryl's books are *Benny and the No-Good Teacher* (nominated for the South Carolina Children's Book Award), *The Class Trip* (an International Reading Association/Children's Book Council Children's Choice book), *Hearts Divided* (1996 Virginia Romance Writers' Holt Medallion winner in the YA category), *Runaway* (winner of a 1996 RWA Rita award), *Paradise* (finalist for a Rita award), *Waiting for Amanda* (winner of an RWA Golden Medallion award). She was inducted into the Romance Writers of America Hall of Fame in 1996. Her books are quite varied, including historical novels, romances (even one involving Internet romance), mysteries, and family relationships. Her most recent young adult book, *Shadow Self*, a story about a teenager doing research and finding an old photograph of a young girl who looks like her, was inspired by a newspaper article about a crime. Cheryl often gets book ideas from the news.

Some of her books were written under pseudonyms: Jennifer Cole, Jamie Suzanne, and recently Nicole Byrd. There have been two reasons for doing this. One is that in series books, such as the "Sweet Valley Twins" series, different authors write different books in the series and the publisher publishes them all under one pseudonym. Therefore, although Cheryl wrote five of these books under the name of Jamie Suzanne, not all Jamie Suzanne books are by her. She is currently writing historical romance novels for adults with her daughter, Michelle Nicole Place, under the combined pen name of Nicole Byrd, partly to distinguish her adult books from her young adult books.

The collaboration with her daughter developed more or less by accident. Michelle grew up wanting to be, "anything but a writer like her mother," according to Cheryl. In college Michelle was studying to be an interior designer. About halfway through she called her mother to say she was changing universities and changing majors. She had decided to become a writer. Sometime later, she was critiquing a manuscript for an adult historical romance that Cheryl was developing. Her ideas were so good and fit with Cheryl's ideas so well that Cheryl suggested that Michelle write some scenes. She did, and they decided that they worked well as a team, so they coauthored the book. That book was *Robert's Lady*, published by Jove Books. It is set in Regency England, early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a location and time period that they both love. Their second book was *Dear Imposter*. Their joint web site is [www.nicolebyrd.com](http://www.nicolebyrd.com). It is Michelle, on

their web site, who referred to her mother as "author extraordinaire," a sign of her admiration for her mother's works.

Cheryl has a strong interest in history. Her research includes reading history books, diaries, and journals and visiting museums, battlefields, and other historically significant sites. She puts this research to good use in her "Southern Angels" series, which takes place during the Civil War.

*Hearts Divided* tells the story of a Southern girl who falls in love with a Union soldier she has met at a boarding school. *Winds of Betrayal* is about a Creole lady. The heroine of *Dreams of Freedom* is a slave girl who works for the Underground Railroad.

Cheryl is a full member of the technological age, although she started out writing in a corner of the kitchen on a typewriter. She now not only uses the computer for writing and e-mailing, but also has had her own web site, in addition to the one she shares with her daughter. She says she intends to re-activate her personal site. She has not, however, relinquished any of her love of traditional books. Her home office is lined with shelves of books.

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"Give the kids a certain amount of latitude and find something they are really interested in reading. ... If we don't get our kids to read, they are not going to succeed at anything."

– Cheryl Byrd Zach

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Like most book lovers, she has trouble designating a favorite author because she enjoys so many, but the name of Madeleine L'Engle comes up in the conversation. Before Cheryl had sold a book, Madeleine L'Engle taught a class that she attended. This gracious lady was very encouraging, and Cheryl got an award in the class. Favorite books when she was a child included *Doctor Doolittle*, *The Borrowers*, *Mary Poppins*, *Tom Sawyer*, and the Little House books.

Cheryl says she keeps a "weird schedule, a night schedule" when she works. "Getting up early doesn't work for me," she says. She works from noon to five o'clock, takes a break, and works again, sometimes as late as two or even four o'clock in the morning.

Sometimes Cheryl's publishers don't forward all of the letters children send to her, but she answers the ones she receives. She likes knowing that she has touched their lives with her writing.

Although she used to do quite a few school visits, she has done fewer since she has been working on the adult historical romances. She remembers one visit to a high school in North Long Beach in California. The school looked like a minimum-security prison, complete with a ten-foot fence and a guard carrying a walky-talky. They had screened the kids who came to her presentation. As she talked, a boy walked up to the front and poured himself some water from her water pitcher—a bit distracting to a speaker.

Cheryl is proud of her children, who turned out well despite divorce, and she is proud of the books with her name on them. She derives great satisfaction from seeing her books on the shelves. When asked if she draws on the lives of family members for her books, she said she draws a lot on her own life. However, her children used to tell her not to put certain things in her books; they may have had good reason.

Cheryl's heroes are ordinary people who do extraordinary things. She refers to people such as those in New York who gave their lives for others.

When asked to describe herself, Cheryl says that she is an introvert. She loves books and loves to travel, but she likes having a home in one spot as a base. Her idea of a perfect vacation is a trip to England to visit museums and libraries. She lived there some years ago. She also likes to visit American Civil War and Revolutionary War sites. Although she never had one of her own, she always loved horses, and she took horseback riding lessons. She also studied karate, not something generally associated with introverted writers.

Cheryl is definitely "one of us." As a former teacher and an avid reader, she believes strongly in the importance of reading, saying, "Give the kids a certain amount of latitude and find something they are really interested in reading. . . . If we don't get our kids to read, they are not going to succeed at anything." Those are our sentiments exactly.

## Tennessee Reading Association Reading Advocacy Award

Guidelines for the Nominating a Candidate for the TRA Reading Advocacy Award: This award is presented to an individual whose primary occupation or vocation is not teaching but who advocates for literacy development.

### The nominee should be an individual who:

- Supports Reading/Language Arts as vital to the learning process
- Speaks, writes and/or develops legislation and/or policy to support the teaching of Reading/Language Arts
- Supports the components of teaching reading/language arts, such as continuing professional development for teachers, assessment and evaluation of reading/language arts achievement, and acquisition of materials for enhancement of reading/language arts programs
- The nominee does not advocate particular teaching methods or a particular published program
- Supports reading/language arts instruction from kindergarten through the high school years

### The Nominating Process

- Identify potential candidates from a variety of individuals such as:
  - National Education Committee members
  - National senators and/or representatives

State Education Committee members

State legislators by district

Local officials and/or administrators

Nominators are encouraged to be imaginative and creative in determining who would be a worthy recipient of this award.

- Solicit recommendations from TRA Board members at Summer Leadership Conference
- Evaluate history of the efforts of the nominee to determine if there has been long term dedication to the promotion of the reading/language arts
- Get consensus of other educators relative to the merit of your nominee.

### Award Presentation at the Fall TRA Conference

- Photos session with key state level dignitaries
- Press release to all major media outlets
- Plaque and certificate presented to the winner

There is no formal application for nominations.

Send nominations and/or inquiries to:

Ms. Sharon Lassiter, 2228 Osburn Rd., Arrington, TN  
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|                 | SR2  | 06/11 |
| Brentwood, TN   | SR1  | 06/12 |
|                 | SR2  | 06/13 |
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|                 | SR2  | 06/25 |
| Cleveland, TN   | SR1  | 06/27 |
|                 | SR2  | 06/28 |

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# High-Stakes Assessment in Reading

## A Position Statement of the International Reading Association

Released for Publication in May, 1999

The Board of Directors of the International Reading Association is opposed to high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing means that one test is used to make important decisions about students, teachers, and schools. In a high-stakes testing situation, if students score high on a single test they could be placed in honors classes or a gifted program. On the other hand, if students score low on a high-stakes test, it could mean that they will be rejected by a particular college, and it could affect their teacher's salary and the rating of the school district as compared with them where the same test was given.

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Our central concern is that testing has become a means of controlling instruction as opposed to a way of gathering information to help students become better readers.

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In the United States in recent years there has been an increase in policy makers' and educators' reliance on high-stakes testing in which single test scores are used to make important educational decisions. The International Reading Association is deeply concerned about this trend. The Board of Directors offers this position statement as a call for the evaluation of the impact of current types and levels of testing on teaching quality, student motivation, educational policy making, and the public's perception of the quality of schooling. Our central concern is that testing has become a means of controlling instruction as opposed to a way of gathering information to help students become better readers. To guide educators who must use tests as a key element in the information base used to make decisions about the progress of individual children and the quality of instructional programs, we offer this position in the form of a question-and-answer dialogue. This format is intended to ensure that important conceptual, practical, and ethical issues are considered by those responsible for designing and implementing testing programs.

### What does the term *high-stakes testing* mean?

High-stakes testing means that the consequences for good (high) or poor (low) performance on a test are substantial. In other words, some very important decisions, such as promotion or retention, entrance into an educational institution, teacher salary, or a school district's autonomy depend on a single test score.

High-stakes tests have been a part of education for some time. Perhaps the most conspicuous form of high-stakes testing, historically speaking, was in the British educational system. National exams in England and in other countries that adopted the British system separated students into different educational tracks. In the United States, tests such as the Medical College Admission Test and Law School Admission Test, as well as professional certification examinations (for example, state bar examinations, medical board examinations, state teacher examinations) all represent high-stakes tests. The meaning of high stakes can be confusing at times. Tests that have no specific decision tied to them can become high stakes to teachers and school administrators when they must face public pressure after scores are made public. In other cases, a low-stakes state test can be transformed into a high-stakes test at a school district level if a local school board decides to make educational or personnel decisions based on the test results.

### Why are we concerned with high-stakes testing?

Although high-stakes testing has been and probably will continue to be part of the educational landscape, there has been an increase in such testing in recent years, particularly at the state level. More children are being tested at younger ages, and states and local school districts are using these tests to make a greater variety of important decisions than ever before. Increased frustration with lack of achievement has led to a greater reliance on testing. In response to these frustrations many states have adopted educational standards and assessments of those standards. The logic is that tests of standards accompanied by a reward and penalty structure will

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improve children's achievement. In too many cases the assessment is a single multiple-choice test, which would be considered high stakes and would not yield enough information to make an important instructional decision.

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From the viewpoint of educators, the primary purpose of assessment is to help students by providing information about how instruction can be improved.

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### **Is testing an important part of good educational design?**

Yes, testing students' skills and knowledge is certainly an important part of education, but it is only one type of educational assessment. Assessment involves the systematic and purposeful collection of data to inform actions. From the viewpoint of educators, the primary purpose of assessment is to help students by providing information about how instruction can be improved. Assessment has an important role to play in decision making beyond the classroom level, however. Administrators, school board members, policy makers, and parents make significant decisions that impact students. The needs of many audiences must be considered in building a quality assessment plan.

Testing is a form of assessment that involves the systematic sampling of behavior under controlled conditions. Testing can provide quick, reliable data on student performance. Single tests might be used to make decisions that do not have major long term consequences, or used to supplement other forms of assessment such as focused interviews, classroom observations and anecdotal records, analysis of work samples, and work inventories.

Different kinds of assessment produce different kinds of information. If a teacher needs to know whether a student can read a particular textbook, there are many sources of information available to her. She can consult district wide achievement tests in reading, estimate the level of the textbook, determine what score a student would need to read the textbook effectively, and then make a decision. However, it might be simpler for the teacher to ask the student to read a section of the text and then talk with the student about the text. This would probably be faster and more accurate than looking up test scores and conducting studies to see what kind of a test score is needed to comprehend the textbook. In general,

teachers need information specific to the content and strategies they are teaching, and they can best get that information through assessments built around their daily educational tasks.

The public and policy makers have different needs from teachers. In general they need to know whether the school, school district, and state are effectively educating the students in their charge. For this purpose they need to collect information about many students, and they need to know how those students stand in relation to other students across the United States or in relation to some specific standards set by the state. For these purposes, standardized norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests are efficient and can give a broad picture of achievement on certain kinds of tasks. These kinds of tests are used most commonly for high-stakes decisions regarding schools and school districts.

### **Why does using tests for high-stakes decisions cause problems?**

There are several possible problematic outcomes of high-stakes testing. These include making bad decisions, narrowing the curriculum, focusing exclusively on certain segments of students, losing instructional time, and moving decision making to central authorities and away from local personnel.

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A possible problematic outcome of high-stakes testing is moving decision making to central authorities and away from local personnel.

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Tests are imperfect. Basing important decisions on limited and imperfect information can lead to bad decisions – decisions that can do harm to students and teachers and that sometimes have unfortunate legal and economic consequences for the schools. Decision makers reduce the chance of making a bad decision by seeking information from multiple sources. However, the information from norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests is inexpensive to collect, easy to aggregate, and usually is highly reliable; for those reasons it is tempting to try to use this information alone to make major decisions.

Another problem is that high-stakes tests have a tendency to narrow the curriculum and inflate the importance of the test. Schools should address a broad range of student learning needs, not just the subjects or parts of

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subject areas covered on a particular test. As the consequences for low performance are raised, teachers feel pressured to raise scores at all costs. This means they will focus their efforts on activities that they think will improve the single important score. Time spent focusing on those activities will come from other activities in the curriculum and will consequently narrow the curriculum. Most state assessments tend to focus on reading, writing, and mathematics. Too much attention to these basic subjects will marginalize the fine arts, physical education, social studies, and the sciences.

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## High-stakes tests have a tendency to narrow the curriculum and inflate the importance of the test.

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Narrowing of the curriculum is most likely to occur in high-poverty schools that tend to have the lowest test scores. Compared to students in schools in affluent communities, students in high-poverty schools receive teaching with a greater emphasis in lower level skills, and they have limited access to instruction focusing on higher level thinking. A recent survey in one state that uses high-stakes assessments found that 75% of classroom teachers surveyed thought the state assessment had a negative impact on their teaching (Hoffman et al., in press).

Another way that educators sometimes respond to test pressure is to focus their attention on particular students. Sometimes this means that only low-performing readers get the instructional resources they need, and those doing only slightly better are ignored. Sometimes there is an attempt to raise test scores by focusing instructional initiatives on those students scoring just below cut-off points, and ignoring those both above or far below cut-off points. And sometimes schools place children in expensive special education programs they do not need, discourage particular children from attending school on testing days, or encourage low-achieving students to drop out of school altogether, all in the name of getting higher test scores.

The loss of instructional time also is a negative result of high-stakes tests. The time for preparing for and taking tests is time taken away from basic instruction. The consequences of lost instructional time, particularly for low-performing students, are too great for information that can be gathered more efficiently.

Finally, we are concerned that instructional decision making in high-stakes testing situations is diverted from local teachers and is concentrated in a central authority far

away from the school. The further decision making is removed from the local level of implementation, the less adaptive the system becomes to individual needs. High-stakes assessment shifts decisions from teachers and principals to bureaucrats and politicians and consequently may diminish the quality of educational services provided to students.

Do test scores improve when high-stakes assessment is mandated?

Test scores in the states with high-stakes assessment plans have often shown improvement. This could be because high-stakes pressure and competition leads teachers to teach reading more effectively. An alternative interpretation is that gains in test scores are the result of “teaching to the test” even when reading does not improve. Analyses of national reading scores do not show the substantial gains claimed by state reading assessments. Studies of norm-referenced tests in states with sustained patterns of growth in state skill assessments show no comparable patterns of gain (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). This may be the result of high-stakes assessments that tend to narrow the curriculum and emphasize only parts of what students need to learn to become successful readers.

## Why don't we just end high-stakes assessment?

It is unlikely that states using these assessments will abandon them. Indeed, the most likely scenario is for an increasing number of states to develop and adopt similar assessment plans. Tests can be useful for making state-level educational decisions, and they provide the public with at least a partial understanding of how well schools are doing. Less positively, politicians, bureaucrats, and test publishers have discovered that they can influence classroom instruction through the use of high-stakes tests. Tests allow these outside parties to take control away from local educational authorities without assuming the responsibilities of educating the students.

Is there a way to help states monitor student success in the curriculum?

If the intent of state assessments is to measure how well students are learning the outcomes identified in the state curriculum framework, then one way students' success can be monitored is by following the NAEP model with selective sampling across student populations and across content areas on a systematic basis. This model monitors achievement without encouraging high-stakes testing. The tests are directed toward particular grade levels and are not given every year. A sampling procedure is used so very few students actually partici-

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pate in testing. NAEP is designed to give a report card on general achievement levels in the basic subject areas over time. Many aspects of the NAEP assessment in reading are commendable. The NAEP sampling strategy has been useful in keeping efficiency high and maintaining a focus on the questions that the national assessment is designed to address. Sampling also has provided NAEP with an opportunity to experiment with a wide variety of testing formats and conditions. Such a strategy would avoid most of the problems associated with teaching to the test. This type of plan would reflect sound principles of instructional design and assessment.

### In the book

*High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation* (Heubert & Hauser, 1999), the following basic principles for test use are presented:

- The important thing about a test is not its validity in general, but its validity when used for a specific purpose. Thus, tests that are valid for influencing classroom practice, “leading” the curriculum, or holding schools accountable are not appropriate for making high-stakes decisions about individual student mastery unless the curriculum, the teaching, and the tests are aligned.

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### No single test score can be considered a definitive measure of a student’s knowledge.

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- Tests are not perfect. Test questions are a sample of possible questions that could be asked in a given area. Moreover, a test score is not an exact measure of a student’s knowledge or skills. A student’s score can be expected to vary across different versions of a test, within a margin of error determined by the reliability of the test, as a function of the particular sample of questions asked and/or transitory factors, such as the student’s health on the day of the test. Thus, no single test score can be considered a definitive measure of a student’s knowledge.
- An educational decision that will have a major impact on a test taker should not be made solely or automatically on the basis of a single test score. Other relevant information about the student’s knowledge and skills should also be taken into account.
- Neither a test score nor any other kind of information can justify a bad decision. Research shows that stu-

dents are typically hurt by a simple retention and repetition of a grade in school without remedial and other instructional support services. In the absence of effective services better tests will not lead to better educational outcomes. (p. 3)

State testing programs should respect these basic principles.

### What are the recommendations of the International Reading Association regarding high-stakes reading assessments?

In framing our recommendations the Association would like to stress two points. First, we recognize accountability is a necessary part of education. Concerns over high-stakes tests should not be interpreted as fear of or disregard for professional accountability. Second, the intent in this position statement is not to blame policy makers for the current dilemma with high-stakes testing.

Our recommendations begin with a consideration of teachers and their responsibility to create rich assessment environments in their classrooms and schools. Next, we suggest that researchers must continue to investigate how assessment can better serve our educational goals. Third, we stress the importance of parents and community members in bringing balance to the assessment design. Finally, we offer recommendations to policy makers for developing a plan of action.

### Recommendations to teachers:

- Construct more systematic and rigorous assessments for classrooms, so that external audiences will gain confidence in the measures that are being used and their inherent value to inform decisions.
- Take responsibility to educate parents, community members, and policy makers about the forms of classroom-based assessment, used in addition to standardized tests, that can improve instruction and benefit students learning to read.
- Understand the difference between ethical and unethical practices when teaching to the test. It is ethical to familiarize students with the format of the test so they are familiar with the types of questions and responses required.

Spending time on this type of instruction is helpful to all and can be supportive of the regular curriculum.

It is not ethical to devote substantial instructional time teaching to the test, and it is not ethical to focus instructional time on particular students who are most

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likely to raise test scores while ignoring groups unlikely to improve.

- Inform parents and the public about tests and their results.
- Resist the temptation to take actions to improve test scores that are not based on the idea of teaching students to read better.

### **Recommendations to researchers:**

- Conduct ongoing evaluations of high-stakes tests. These studies should include but not be limited to teacher use of results, impact on the curriculum focus, time in testing and test preparation, the costs of the test (both direct and hidden), parent and community communication, and effects on teacher and student motivations. There are few data on the impact of tests on instruction. Good baseline data and follow-up studies will help in monitoring the situation. These studies should not be left to those who design, develop, and implement tests; they should be conducted by independent researchers.
- Find ways to link performance assessment alternatives to questions that external audiences must address on a regular basis. Researchers must continue to offer demonstrations of ways that data from performance assessments can be aggregated meaningfully. This strategy will allow them to build trustworthy informal assessments.

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Parents must ask questions about what tests are doing to their children and their schools.

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### **Recommendations to parents, parent groups, and child advocacy groups:**

- Be vigilant regarding the costs of high-stakes tests on students. Parents must ask questions about what tests are doing to their children and their schools. They cannot simply accept the “we’re just holding the school accountable” response as satisfactory. They must consider cost, time, alternative methods, and emotional impact on students as a result of these tests.
- Lobby for the development of classroom-based forms of assessment that provide useful, understandable information, improve instruction, and help children become better readers.

### **Recommendations to policy makers:**

- Design an assessment plan that is considerate of the complexity of reading, learning to read, and the teaching of reading. A strong assessment plan is the best ally of teachers and administrators because it supports good instructional decision making and good instructional design. Consider the features of good assessment as outlined in *Standards for the Assessment Of Reading and Writing* (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1994) in designing an assessment plan. Be aware of the pressures to use tests to make high-stakes decisions.
- When decisions about students must be made that involve high-stakes outcomes (e.g., graduation, matriculation, awards) rely on multiple measures rather than just performance on a single test. The experiences in England with high-stakes assessment have been instructive. England has moved to an assessment system that values teacher informal assessments, ongoing performance assessments, portfolios, teacher recommendations, and standardized testing. The triangulation of data sources leads to more valid decision making.
- Use sampling strategies when assessments do not involve decisions related to the performance of individual students (e.g., program evaluation). Sampling is less intrusive, less costly, and just as reliable as full-scale assessment plans. Sampling strategies also provide an opportunity to design alternate forms and types of assessments. Such a variety of assessments encourages careful inspection of issues of validity and reliability.
- Do not use incentives, resources, money, or recognition of test scores to reward or punish schools or teachers. Neither the awards (e.g., blue ribbon schools) nor the punishing labels (e.g., low-performing schools) are in the interest of students or teachers. The consequences of achieving or not achieving in schools are real enough. Well-intentioned efforts to recognize achievement often become disincentives to those who need the most help.
- Do not attempt to manipulate instruction through assessments. In other words, do not initiate, design, or implement high-stakes tests when the primary goal is to affect instructional practices. Ask the question, “Is the primary goal of the assessment to collect data that will be used to make better decisions that impact the individual students taking the test?” If the answer is “no,” high-stakes tests are inappropriate.

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The pattern of testing as the preferred tool to manipulate teaching continues to expand. We call on educators, policy makers, community leaders, and parents to take a common-sense look at the testing in schools today. Visit classrooms. Talk to teachers. Listen to teachers talk about

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To be opposed to large- scale, high-stakes testing is not to be opposed to assessment or accountability. It is to affirm the necessity of aligning our purposes and goals with our methods.

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the curriculum and the decisions they are making. Talk to the teachers about the kinds of assessments they use in the classroom and how they use collected data. To be opposed to large- scale, high-stakes testing is not to be opposed to assessment or accountability. It is to affirm the necessity of aligning our purposes and goals with our methods.

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### Suggested Readings

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## Learning Homophones Can Be Fun: Reed This and Yule Sea!

Most people enjoy playing with words. The English language is full of words that represent more than one meaning, sound identical (in most dialects), but are spelled differently. While this presents an obstacle for non-native English speakers and can be confusing to all young writers trying to correctly spell the words they intend, such words can make comedians of us all. We use them for puns and other jokes and games.

Authors and creative teachers have long relied on homophones for a variety of interesting and instructive word plays. Fred Gwynne's books such as *The King Who Rained* are great fun and provide grist for young authors writing their own word

play books. They are excellent vocabulary builders and help learners see the world from alternative vantage points – a very enlightening activity for the growing mind.

The following list of homophones is offered to assist in the efforts of teachers and students as they create texts with sound alike words. The words are arranged alphabetically while proper nouns have been avoided. Although the list is extensive it is by no means complete. Have fun with the homophone list and add any new (gnu) pairs (pears) you (ewe) meet (meat). Words are the marvelous building blocks by which we label our entire world!

### Homophones

|                    |                  |                 |                     |                   |                     |                   |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| A. aid aide        | D. days daze     | hey hay         | metal mettle        | plough plow       | sighs size          | tool tulle        |
| ale ail            | dew do due       | hi high         | missed mist         | pole poll         | sight cite site     | tow toe           |
| all awl            | die dye          | him hymn        | missle missal       | poor pour pore    | sign sine           | tray trey         |
| aloud allowed      | done dun         | hoarse horse    | mistle              | praise prays      | sleigh slay         | troop troupe      |
| ant aunt           | dough doe        | hole whole      | mite might          | presents presence | sloe slow           | trust trussed     |
| B. ball bawl       | E. eight ate     | hour our        | more moor           | prey pray         | slough slew         | tune toon         |
| balm bomb          | err air heir     | I. in inn       | mussel muscle       | purse perse       | so sew              | turn tern         |
| be bee             | eye aye          | I'll aisle isle | N. naval navel      | Q. queue cue      | son sun             | U. undo undue     |
| bear bare          | eyrie airy       | J. jam jamb     | new gnu             | R. rail rale      | sore soar           | V. vail vale veil |
| bin been           | F. fare fair     | jewel joule     | none nun            | rain reign rein   | soul sole           | vain vane vein    |
| bite byte          | feet feat        | K. kohl coal    | not knot            | rays raze raise   | strait straight     | very vary         |
| blue blew          | file phial       | knew new        | O. offal awful      | read reed         | stair stare         | vile vial         |
| bore boar          | flee flea        | know no         | one won             | reel real         | stake steak         | W. walk wok       |
| bored board        | flour flower     | knows nose      | or oar ore          | red read          | steel steal         | war wore          |
| break brake        | flue flew flu    | L. lain lane    | owe oh              | rite right        | sum some            | ware wear         |
| bred bread         | for four fore    | lax lacks       | P. pail pale        | rode road         | sweet suite         | way weigh whey    |
| bridal bridle      | fowl foul        | led lead        | pain pane           | roll role         | T. lacked tact      | we wee            |
| bust bussted       | fryer friar      | lei lay         | pair pare pear      | room rheum        | lacks tax           | weave we've       |
| by buy bye         | G. gambol gamble | lent leant      | past passed         | rote wrote        | tail tale           | week weak         |
| C. ceiling sealing | gate gait        | lite light      | pawl pall           | rout route        | team team           | weight wait       |
| cell sell          | genes jeans      | loan lone       | peal peel           | row roe           | tee tea             | whose who's       |
| chance chants      | gilt guilt       | loot lute       | pearl purl          | rye wry           | the thee            | wood would        |
| cheep cheap        | great grate      | M. made maid    | pedal peddle        | S. sail sale      | there their they're | wrap rap          |
| chord cord         | gram graham      | maize maze      | phase faze          | see sea           | threw through       | wreck reek        |
| cored              | H. hair hare     | male mail       | picks pyx           | seem seam         | throws throes       | wring ring        |
| close clothes      | hall haul        | mall maul       | piece peace         | seen scene        | thyme time          | write wright      |
| coal Cole          | halve have       | mane main       | plain plane         | sent scent cent   | tic tick            | Y. yolk yoke      |
| cote coat          | heel heal        | marry merry     | prince prints       | shew shoe         | to too two          | you ewe yew       |
| course coarse      | here hear        | meet meat       | principal principle | shoot chute       | ton tun             | your you're yore  |

Reference: Gwynne, F. (1970). *The King Who Rained*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

## Making Our ESL Students Feel More Welcome

By Donna Strawser

Finding ways to merge the culture of my English as Second Language students with the main culture in our community is not always easy to do. It is important, however, to develop understanding and appreciation between ESL students and native speakers of English. The following learning experience worked especially well:

One of my Hispanic students recently celebrated her *quinceañera* in Mexico. This is a huge party the Mexican people usually give to their daughters upon turning 15 years of age. It symbolizes the daughter's move from childhood into adulthood. I decided to capitalize on this celebration and use it for a cultural lesson for the native speakers of English who were studying Spanish in our high school.

My ESL students enthusiastically approved of providing an informative experience about a *quinceañera* for the students studying Spanish. The preparatory activities not only helped them with learning English; it also gave them self-confidence to know that they could stand up in front of a class of native English speakers and give a presentation about something they knew very well, *quinceañera*. The ESL students worked on research and writing skills, organizational competencies, and English language skills in preparation.

When we met with the students studying Spanish, the young lady who celebrated her *quince* really felt special as we showed segments of her video and talked about her special day. The native speakers of English were also impressed that the ESL students were able to communicate so well in both Spanish and English.

My ESL students had been nervous before the presentation, not knowing how the American born native speakers of English would receive them; however, it was a wonderful learning and social experience. The ESL students were not only well accepted but also enthusiastically welcomed. I plan to implement this kind of experience in future classes. It's a great way to build a bridge for greater understanding that both ESL and native speakers of English can cross. What a powerful lesson it was for both classes!

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Donna Strawser teaches ESL students at Monterey High School in Monterey, Tennessee

## Fostering Writing Competencies Using the "Movable Outline"

By Amanda Arnold

How can an English teacher encourage writing competencies without developing the foundation for creating a written work? It's like trying to learn to drive a car without learning how to turn the ignition switch on! Like any other English teacher, I want my seventh graders to communicate effectively through their writing. On the other hand, many of them appear to be intimidated by the very idea of an assignment that involves either creative or expository writing. Some seventh graders would rather go to the orthodontist than tackle a writing assignment!

When I worked as a tutor with college freshmen that were having difficulty in English classes, I remember many students just like my current crop of seventh graders, who appeared to be afraid to start a writing assignment. The college students often had the idea that great writers such as William Shakespeare sat down and wrote a great works like *Romeo and Juliet* without a draft and without making any mistakes. Words, they seemed to believe, just flowed like magic from great literary minds. They seemed to view writing as a talent that could not be a learnable skill.

Although already in college, many of students did not know how to prepare to write a paper and appeared overwhelmed by the impending task. Further, they seemed to believe that their initial drafts were all the proof they needed to demonstrate that they had very limited proficiencies when it came to putting thoughts into written form. The blank sheets of paper in front of the students spurred reactions such as, "I don't know how to start" or "I can't think of anything to write about."

These students needed a plan of action to turn on their pre-writing ignition so they could drive the car instead of just hoping it would roll down hill to their destination. The following pre-writing activity provided the ignition for my students to plan a route to their destination. It is called the "movable outline" and I am glad to say that, with a few adjustments, it can work with students at almost any grade level.

### The Movable Outline

For the purpose of explanation, I will describe the "movable outline" as though it was being used with upper middle school students. First, each student receives six

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different color post-it notes. If I were working with younger children I would use construction paper instead of post-it notes because their writing is usually larger.

Each different color note is used for one of the six questions (who, where, when, what, and how). If I were working with younger children I would use fewer questions. When I work with middle school students I usually assign a topic the first few times such as, "Your favorite place to hide as a child." The students then write one of the above questions on each post-it note and write one sentence on each post-it note that answers the question. For example, if my post-it note said "where" I would write the following: "My favorite place to hide as a child was under a giant oak tree." After the students have written one main (topic) sentence on each note I then ask them to write three more sentences on each note (under the topic sentence) that gives more details about the topic sentence.

After the students have completed writing the three sentences I ask them to place the post-it notes in the order that they think they should follow when they write their first draft. This gives them an outline that is moveable. (When working with younger students I would let them tape the construction paper to the walls.) Each post-it note represents a paragraph. The students create their first draft using their movable outline.

This exercise is very beneficial when teaching students how to organize their thoughts, compose paragraphs, and develop an outline for papers. The post-it note pre-writing activity encourages students to begin writing, to expand upon their original ideas, view writing as a process, and to develop organized papers. This approach makes writing much less intimidating for students. Also, the idea of being able to physically manipulate parts of the developing paper is encouraging. It's fun, it fosters a desire to write, and leads students to compose substantial written works that likely would not materialize without the flexible framework of this prewriting activity, the movable outline.

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Amanda Arnold teaches seventh graders at Rogersville Middle School in Rogersville, Tennessee.

## The Feelings Board

*By Rhonda Brownlee*

Sometimes at the end of the school day I encourage my third graders to create a "feelings board." I may have them write about how they feel at that moment or about

something special that has happened to them that day. I may even give them a topic such as, "I am happy when ..." or, "Rain makes me feel ..." We sometimes write about the topic on paper, make an illustration, and then make a decorative bulletin board. At time we might simply write on the chalkboard telling how we felt at a particular time. The format is very flexible.

I like to give the children a chance to express themselves. I feel that this bulletin board gives them such an opportunity. I enjoy reading their comments and getting to know them better through their expressed emotions. Some students may have had a bad day and I may not have realized it. By doing this activity, I know what's going on with my children and can offer an encouraging word. Even more important, it lets my students know that their teacher cares about how they feel and wants them to express their feelings in a welcoming atmosphere.

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Rhonda Brownlee teaches third graders at Surgoinville Elementary School in Surgoinville, Tennessee.

## Today I learned . . .

*By Carla Pierce*

Having problems finding activities to fit into those last few minutes before school is out? This was a problem for me in my kindergarten class. Also, I never want a child to say s/he did not learn anything during the school day. Therefore, I began using the "Today I learned" activity.

We begin by coming to Sharing Circle. This is a time for students to choose something they did that day and share it with the class. After everyone has had sharing time, I ask, "What have you learned today?" I record the responses on the board as we discuss all the learning that has occurred today. We read the responses aloud, and I ask the students to think of their favorite learning activity. I then give each child a sheet of paper. They return to their tables and write, "Today I learned \_\_\_\_\_" from the responses on the board. Finally, the students illustrate what they have learned that day.

This activity does not take much time and can easily fit into those last few minutes. The children take their papers home daily and always have an answer waiting when their parents ask, "What did you learn at school today?"

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Carla Pierce teaches kindergartners at Rickman Elementary School in Rickman, Tennessee.

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## National Read Across America Day Slumber Party

By Ronda Denn

Many teachers do reading activities for National Read Across America Day. This year, for the first time, my second grade class had a slumber party. We pushed our tables and chairs out of the way and placed sleeping bags, pillows, and blankets on the floor around the room. My students and I wore our pajamas for the day. To help reinforce the importance of reading as a life long learning experience, I asked different people from the community to come in and read to the students. Some of the people who came to read were the County Executive, the Assessor of Property, local business owners, grandparents, parents, and the principal. This is a day that my students did not forget quickly. They have asked to do it again! It was so successful that I plan to continue doing it each year.

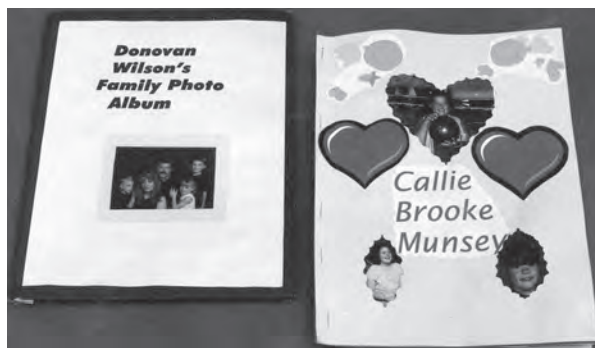
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Ronda Denn teaches students in second grade at Pikeville Elementary School, in Pikeville, Tennessee.

## Family Album

By Jo-Anna Burke with help from Donovan Wilson and Callie Munsey

What to do on a Friday afternoon with my fourth graders? We needed a little relaxation on a recent forthcoming Friday afternoon. On Thursday I invited the students to bring in family pictures that we could put into a book about their families. I was amazed at the enthusiasm of the students and the amount of material they brought to class. Friday afternoon, as planned, I cut paper into 4.5 x 5.5-inch pieces for the pages. I asked the students to prepare the pages about their family using



Covers of photo albums



Page from Donovan's album

pictures and text. They were to write the text and use glue sticks to affix pictures to the pages.

When the pages were complete we would staple them together into book form. The students worked diligently and happily as they carefully studied the pictures and prepared the pages. The children took such care in preparing their family albums that time ran out. I encouraged the children to take their materials home and complete the family album over the weekend. I also encouraged them to use their creative ideas in completing the books.



Page from Callie's family album

On Monday morning, I asked the students to turn in their albums. I was thoroughly delighted with what they presented to me.

They loved making the family albums. However, Callie Munsey and Donovan Wilson took the family album idea I had presented to a much more elaborate level. They explained to me that the book we made in class was just not big enough. Callie and Donovan used their home computers to help with pictures and writing text. They then included special creative touches on each page. I was very proud of these two students and all of the students who participated in the family album activity.

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The most exciting insight for me was knowing how much this activity had inspired my students, especially Callie and Donovan, to use their own ideas and imaginations for completing the book. I intend to use this activity with every class from now on and, further, to encourage the students to prepare an album like the ones completed by Callie and Donovan. I hope Callie and Donovan will let me borrow their albums from time to time as models for students in future classes. However, I doubt they will be willing to let them out of their possession for very long!

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Jo-Anna Burke teaches fourth graders at Springdale Elementary School in Tazwell, Tennessee. Donovan Wilson and Callie Munsey are students in Ms. Burke's class.

## Picture Book Characters Come to Life

By Donna Miller

Modern technology has provided the opportunity for us to enrich reading activities for children in the elementary grades by bringing the characters of picture books to life. For example, I used a flat bed scanner to scan the bear from the front cover of the wonderful children's book, *Corduroy*, by Don Freeman. I enlarged the image and then printed it in color on regular white copy paper. I then glued it to cardstock (110 lb. cover weight paper). I then covered the picture with clear plastic film to increase durability. I placed a small square of magnetic tape on the back so that the character can stick to any metal surface. Almost any story character can be reproduced in the same manner provided there is sufficient detail and contrast in the color of the original. Characters can also be beautifully reproduced using a good quality color photocopy machine. Such copying for the personal use of students fits the "fair use" specifications of copyright regulations.

There are several ways in which children could use the characters. Clothespins can be glued to the back of the characters and they can be used as bookmarks that can be clipped to a page to save a place. The characters can also

### Scanned character on a magnetic board

be attached to wooden craft sticks and the children could use the "puppets" to act out the story. This can also be done on a magnetic board; many dry erase boards in schools are also magnetic boards.

Inviting students to listen to a story and then retell the story while placing the characters on a magnetic board is a good way to informally assess listening comprehension. I have found that students are much more relaxed when retelling a story when they have the cut out characters to assist in the retelling.

Picture books with an accompanying set of cardstock characters can be stored in individual plastic zip-lock freezer bags and used to stimulate interest. Children could check out the books and corresponding characters and take them home to share the stories with their parents and families. It's likely the refrigerator would make a great base for the story characters to "come to life".

Further, I have made audio recordings of books to add to the freezer bag. This encourages repeated readings of the book while attention is focused on the printed words. Audiotapes with just 15 minutes on each side are available from Radio Shack. The shorter tapes are preferable for recording children's books to avoid excessive amounts of blank space on the tapes.

Making story characters is very enjoyable and highly beneficial. I'm delighted to see how this simple enhancement activity fosters a love of reading among children.

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Donna Miller is a student in the Master of Arts in Teaching program at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee.



# Professional Books

By Elinor Ross

## *Guided Comprehension: A Teaching Model for Grades 3-8*

By Maureen McLaughlin and Mary Beth Allen (2002). Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 276 pp., paperback, \$29.95. ISBN 0-87207-172-3.

An IRA Book Club Selection for November 2001, *Guided Comprehension* is an excellent source of ideas for teaching children to comprehend what they read. McLaughlin and Allen offer a three-step model for guided comprehension, but whether or not you implement the entire model, you will find many practical ideas for helping your students become more strategic readers.

In their opening, the authors point out the disparity between what researchers know about the best techniques for teaching comprehension and actual classroom practices. According to research, reading is a thinking and comprehending process that involves the application of a wide variety of strategies. It is a transaction that connects readers with text. What the authors observed in classrooms, however, was that although teachers might go over or share strategies with their students, they were not directly teaching the students how to apply them.

As a result of their observations, McLaughlin and Allen developed the Guided Comprehension Model, which they refer to as “a framework designed to help teachers and students engage in reading as a thinking process” (p. 2). They continue, “Guided Comprehension is a context in which students learn comprehension strategies in a variety of settings using multiple levels and types of text” (p. 3). The Model consists of three stages: Stage One is teacher-directed, whole-group instruction; Stage Two allows students to apply strategies in different settings, including teacher-guided small groups and student-facilitated comprehension centers; and Stage Three enables teachers and students to reflect on their performance, share experiences, and set new goals.

The Model is related to selected research-based tenets that affect successful reading comprehension, such as “Reading should occur in meaningful contexts” and “Comprehension strategies and skills can be taught” (p. 6). The authors expand on each of the 10 tenets they have identified, first explaining the meaning of the tenet and then showing its connection to the Guided Comprehension Model.

The first chapter of this book provides the rationale and research base for the Guided Comprehension Model. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explain each of the stages of the Model in depth and provide specific activities for imple-

menting them. In Chapter 5 there is a discussion about how to select appropriate texts by considering the level of the book and matching it to the reading level of the student. Chapter 6 deals with the roles of assessment in the Guided Comprehension process, particularly those that afford insights into students’ thinking and performance. These include attitude surveys, interest inventories, and a metacognitive reading awareness inventory. Classroom applications is the topic for Chapter 7 (see discussion below), and the final chapter (Chapter 8) consists of reflections on the Guided Comprehension Model. Most chapters are directly linked to corresponding appendixes.

Chapter 7 demonstrates ways that teachers have applied the Model in their classrooms. At the conclusion of each lesson, the teachers updated their assessments through their observations. The three examples that follow illustrate some ways that teachers have used the Guided Comprehension Model in their classrooms.

Using the theme of Native Americans, fourth-grade teacher Beth Gress used Anticipation/Reaction Guides for previewing. She modeled a Think-Aloud activity to demonstrate ways to access prior knowledge in order to make educated guesses about each statement on the Guide. Students completed the first part of the Guide before reading. They then participated in Literature Circles by reading fiction and nonfiction books about Native Americans and later connected the texts to their answers on the Guide. For example, in response to the statement on the Guide that Native Americans have ceremonies to receive their names, Jamel wrote, “I believe that Native Americans do have ceremonies to receive their names because Moss earns his new name after going on away time” (p. 94).

Sixth-grade teacher Jacquelyn Seaborg used a variety of texts in her unit about the Holocaust for teaching evaluative questions. Since she had been reading *Anne Frank* (McDonough, 1997) to her class, she showed students how to apply Evaluative Questioning to a section of the book. Students then generated their own evaluative questions and responses as she continued reading. One student’s question was, “How would you defend what the Frank family did to avoid being sent to the concentration camp?” Another asked, “What do you think happened to the friends that helped smuggle food and clothing to the Frank family?” (p. 95). Students then

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participated in Literature Circles using other books about the Holocaust. At the end of the lesson, they used the Think-Pair-Share strategy to reflect on how to use evaluative questioning during their reading.

David Watkins, eighth-grade teacher, opened his unit by discussing concepts about opinions and persuasion. Then he read the article “The Right to Bear Arms” and provided his students with Discussion Webs. These webs are graphic organizers that are designed to enable students to give reasons for and against an issue, provide a conclusion, and supply justification for the conclusion. Watkins posed the question of whether or not the U.S. Constitution should be changed to prevent private ownership of guns and presented arguments on both sides of the issue. He related this topic to school violence and the influence of media. He urged students to find more support for both sides of the issue and then make informed decisions. They found additional material on the Internet and completed Discussion Webs on such topics as gun control, effects of mass media, and school violence.

The appendixes that follow Chapter 8 are extensive, covering more than half of the book. You may also find them to be the most useful feature for classroom applications. For example, Appendix A (52 pages long!) contains an abundance of teaching ideas, along with reproducible forms. There are several ideas for each of the following categories: previewing, self-questioning, making connections, visualizing, knowing how words work, monitoring, summarizing, and evaluating. Some of the

ideas are old friends, such as Say Something, semantic feature analysis, semantic maps, guided imagery, and K-W-L, but others are less familiar (e.g., meeting of the minds and predict-o-grams). Comprehension Routines is a separate heading in Appendix A and includes the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, Literature Circles, Questioning the Author, and Reciprocal Teaching. Other appendixes deal with such topics as managing and organizing comprehension centers, literature response prompts, leveled book resources, and assessment. I found the Metacomprehension Strategy Index in Appendix E especially intriguing. Using a multiple-choice format with no predetermined correct answers, the reader must decide which strategies are most helpful for better understanding a story.

This book is clearly written, well organized, logical, and reader-friendly. Many pages contain bulleted lists that make important content stand out, and headings are large, logically organized, and easy to follow. Each chapter begins with an introduction and concludes with a brief bibliography for further reading. A more comprehensive list of references appears at the end of the book.

Comprehension is an essential skill for success in reading, but many teachers are uncertain how to teach comprehension skills and strategies directly. This book provides easy-to-follow, step-by-step procedures. It is one of the most complete books for teaching comprehension strategies that I have seen. After reviewing it, I felt excited about trying some of these ideas myself!