Special Issue

Linger over language

An Inside Look at West De Pere's Language Arts Program
THE WISCONSIN
ENGLISH JOURNAL
The Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English Language Arts

Submission Guidelines

♦ Send two copies of each manuscript, typed and double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and references), with one-inch margins. Information (including addresses) on coming issues is located in the Editor's Note in this issue.

OR
Submit your manuscript electronically to the editor, Ruth Wood (Ruthann.P.Wood@uwrf.edu); a Word attachment is preferred.

♦ Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.

♦ Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the Guidelines for Nonexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications.

♦ Follow MLA format throughout.

The name, address, school affiliation, telephone number, and e-mail of the author should appear on the title page only, not on the manuscript. If the manuscript is accepted, the author will need to provide a disk copy of the manuscript in Word.

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Printing
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Eau Claire, WI 715/835-6631
Editor's Note

Dear WEJ Readers:

We are pleased to present a new concept in the spring issue of WEJ with an exciting array of articles about one particular Wisconsin secondary English program: West De Pere High School. Our motivation is to "inspire through modeling." We think WPD's English/Language Arts program contains many fine features from which our readers might gain ideas about English teaching to add to or adopt in their own programs.

Our team of editors—Ruth Wood, David Beard and Scott Johnson—spent one full day attending classes and interviewing teachers, administrators and students at WDPHS and many hours reading the texts submitted by the teachers for inclusion here. We've had a wonderful, inspiring time ourselves. On our drive back to River Falls, both David and Scott, who at times considered pursuing certification, said, "If I'd had an opportunity to observe English programs like this one, I'd have hung in there!"

What makes West De Pere special? For starters, the *dramatis personae* include a fine administrative team, including Principal Jerry Berner and Associate Principal Russ Gerke, Superintendent Dr. Lanny Tibalbo and Curriculum Director Joan Nocenti. Seven female teachers "united and strong," "beautiful and formidable" (in the words of Johnson and Robertson) have a combined teaching experience of about 150 years. Department chair, Bonnie Frechette, is a recent winner of WCTELA's "Teacher of the Year" Award who inspires through her own dedication and talent and leads with attentiveness to her colleagues' needs and dispositions (which we learned through observation and testimonial!).

The *mise en scene* includes a special area of the school designated for Language classes only—"The Loft"—and a method of planning curriculum that keeps everyone "united and strong"—and probably formidable as well! The ninth and tenth grade programs—acts one and two of the "script"—are planned and delivered with consistency through teamwork. The ninth grade curriculum includes "Heroes" (featuring Homer's *Odyssey*), "Relationships R Us," and a short story/literary analysis unit; the tenth grade is divided into a fall writing semester and a spring speech semester. Rising action and denouement? Eleventh grade students can elect among various American literature offerings, including a College Honors Seminar, for which students receive credit through St. Norbert College. Twelfth grade students choose among "Literature and Media," "Literature and People," Public Speaking, and "Future World." (See a fuller listing on page 14.)

And, as in any epic presentation, there are dozens of "extras"—extracurriculars, extra opportunities, and extra attention from a very student-centered staff. Read about how these special details come together in the following:
I. The Place and the Players
   “The Loft” by Jane Johnson
   “Ladies of the Loft” by Sue Robertson
   “Team Planning in ‘The Loft’” by Jayne Feldhausen and Natalie Buhl
   “Three Going on Thirty” by Natalie Buhl

II. Curricular Staples
   “What Smart People Do” by Bonnie Frechette
   “The Nursing Home Project” by Bonnie Frechette
   “Idea Journals” by Natalie Buhl
   “‘Experiential’ Ideas for Homer’s Odyssey” by Jane Johnson

III. Enticing Electives
   “A Sampling of Future World Through Literature Projects” by Betty Bienash
   “You Are What You See” by Georgene Lindbeck
   “A Sampling of Lit and Media Projects” by Georgene Lindbeck
   “Bringing the Classics to Life” by Jayne Feldhausen
   “Make It a Challenge” by Jayne Feldhausen
   “Students Shine at Readers’ Theatre” by Sue Robertson

IV. Class out of Class
   “Excellence Across and Outside the Curriculum” by David Beard
   “We Have Class out of Class Too” by Betty Bienash
   “Perks of Being an English Nerd” by Stephanie Voight,
   with textboxes by Carrie Lorig

Call for Papers
Wallace Sherlock will be the guest editor for the Fall 2004 issue of Wisconsin English Journal. The topic is bilingual education. The intention is neither to defend or discredit bilingual education, but to sharpen our abilities to deliver it. We welcome submissions that discuss your ideas and experience in how to best provide bilingual education in elementary, middle, high school and college classrooms. Send copy for this issue to Wallace Sherlock (sherlocw@uwrf.edu; fax 262-472-1988).

We are planning to make the spring 2005 issue a repeat of featuring an outstanding English/Language Arts program. If you are a teacher in or a former student of such a program, please send word to us that you’d your language arts department like to be considered. Give us e-mail and postal information so that we may keep in contact with you.

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Special Thanks
Special thanks to the UWRF Faculty and Staff Development Board for supporting this project (analyzing West De Pere) through a grant.

Special thanks to Scott Johnson for Photography, Design, and Layout on this special issue.
West De Pere High School

Mission Statement

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WDPHS Language Arts Department

The Mission of the Language Arts Department is to create a comprehensive educational and social environment for students providing a solid knowledge base in all areas of language arts as well as opportunities to grow in all language arts skill areas. Students are encouraged to strive for excellence as continuous learners. Reading both classics and contemporary literature is encouraged as is writing for a variety of audiences in a variety of formats. Opportunities for both advanced students and struggling students are provided. Our goal is that each student achieve optimum intellectual and social growth through a challenging English language arts and literature curriculum aligned to Wisconsin state standards.

West De Pere High School
665 Grant Street
De Pere, WI 54115
The Loft
by Jane Johnson

"Good Morning!"
"Bonjour!"
"Hey, W.J., what do you say?"
"How you doin'?"
"Hey, Johnson, you're too loud!"
"¡Buenos Dias!"

Sound like you must have landed in a convention center or marketplace? Maybe you've heard about or read that infamous "Fish" book about those guys who know how to have fun at work. Well, in the Loft, we may not throw fish, but we sure know how to have fun! So what exactly is the Loft? Good question. Even though I am a "Loftian," I'm not sure I can answer that question adequately. (And by the way, a Loftian is in no way, shape or form like a Martian.) I'll start at the beginning.

When the 2002-2003 school year started, we at West De Pere High School had a newly remodeled building. In their infinite wisdom, the administrators chose to put the departments together, each department in its own hallway. By some quirk of fate, the Language Arts and Foreign Language departments ended up in the only upper hallway of the school. Either we are seen as the elite, or they just wanted us as far away as possible. We chose to believe the former, and therefore, named our hallway the Loft.
We Loftians are unique in many ways.

1. The Language Arts department consists of seven women, and the Foreign Language Department consists of three women; thus, the Loftians are ten women united and strong! (Needless to say, chocolate is a force unto itself up here.)

2. The Loft has its own set of rules, properly entitled “The Loft Rules!":

   Use appropriate language!
   Be on time!
   No open beverages in the hall!
   Take pride; keep The Loft clean!
   *In fine print: Don’t forget to tip the teachers. (Chocolate works.)

3. On the monitors which display the pictures from the security cameras, all other halls are identified by letters (i.e. G Hall, D Hall). When our hall is displayed, it is called The Loft. We have been recognized; we are official.

When students are asked how they would describe The Loft, common responses are:
   “They’re crazy up there!”
   “It’s friendly; the teachers are always in the hall saying hello.”

And that’s just how we like it. We believe if there are rules, enforce them. We want students to know what our expectations are, so they can be sure to achieve them. We say hello, usually calling the students by name; we give high fives, hand shakes, smiles. At times, one may even see students and teachers hugging. Oh we know it’s not “recommended,” but we believe teaching is still a profession of people helping people. Contact is necessary at times. These young adults know we care. One student told me that the English department always knows what’s going on in the students’ lives. Good reason for that. We listen; we talk; we attend games, concerts, plays, performances.

We are often thought to be over-caffeinated (maybe because we have our own coffee maker in the Loft), but it’s not the caffeine that energizes us. It’s our passion for what we do. It’s our love for our students. It’s our relationships with one another. We are friends up here. Friends who share a common goal: enriching our students’ lives. It’s a great place to be.
Ladies of the Loft
by Sue Robertson

The happy accident that placed our department on the only upper level of our school is not what makes us unique. In reality, naming our area ‘The Loft’ is an example of what we do best: we make lemonade out of lemons. The Loft is the area farthest from everything—the library, the cafeteria, student services, and the office. Lemon: We’re the only ones who have to climb the stairs. Lemonade: This is good cardiovascular exercise! Lemon: We can’t possibly make it to the cafeteria and back and still have time to eat lunch. Lemonade: Making and bringing lunches from home is cheaper and much healthier! Being removed from the office doesn’t need any other rationalization.

We were a cohesive group before we ever moved to the Loft. We’ve always worked hard at nurturing our relationships. To the outsider it may look like we’re having way too much fun, but the truth is we need to schedule some of it... sort of like a married couple setting aside a date night to re-connect. We take the time to meet socially, off campus, several times a year. Dinner is usually an integral part; in a relaxed atmosphere, where we always vow not to let school dominate our conversation (yeah, right!), we are more likely to share our lives, foibles and idiosyncrasies. We tend to be loud. We laugh a lot. We talk as much as we eat.

Department dates are not the only way we connect. We play “Secret Santa” in an exchange which includes our partners in crime, the foreign language department. We each buy five $1.00 gifts to secretly slip to our exchange partners. At other times of the year you’ll find us running from room to room before school delivering Valentines, Easter candies, and Shakespeare’s birthday treats. Most of us eat lunch together in our department room. We have a coffee club in this room as well. By 7:30 each morning you’ll find nearly every one of us stopping in or staying to discuss team planning or the latest must-read book. Our current favorite is The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown. You’ll also find a small library. As we finish reading books we love, we add them to the library of “Books to Share” near the coffeemaker.

The most powerful form of nurturing isn’t connected to a special day. It occurs daily when we show concern about a family member who is ill, when we offer congratulations for a job well done, when we share ideas, projects and materials, when we express our thanks to people who don’t even expect it, and when we tease each other out of the low times and turn them into times of laughter. We support one another. If you take on one of us, you’re taking on all of us. Heaven help the sorry soul who tries to tackle the ladies of the Loft.

We are seven beautiful, formidable women whose individual uniqueness makes us whole. Department chair, Bonnie, Bonita really, has the soul of a Mother Theresa and the attitude of a cheerleader. She has to be the perkiest person one is likely to meet. Good job, Bonita!

Betty is the soft-spoken one, the one who listens. She loves descriptive language. If something isn’t worth reading. That’s not Odyssey.

Jayne was the coordinator (short for “Maximizing.”) She once suspect she coerced her. Our #1 sports fan, she was devastated recently when her beloved basketball games finally ceased.

Georganne is the keeper of knowledge, and is unwavering. She is fond of saying, “I can’t be our resident O.C., I’m not an O.C.”

Jane is Comedy Central’s laughter at “Sybil.” You can’t help but sing a lilting Mr. Rogers theme after being in her face of a trouble maker. “Make my day...”. We all love her, even the guidance director at her church.

Natalie is the new kid around. She believes that teachers can do anything. Natalie began our Loft group. She has spearheaded, some people aren’t sure why. The Loft potluck dinner followed.

Sue...I’m the odd one out. I’ve been teaching for 13 years of teaching, so I’ve been blessed with the best team. I’ve worked with the brightest, most wonderful teacher and the shopper. And I love it.

We are very different. But each one of us is a vital part of the Loft.
is likely to meet. Good grief! She even likes freshmen.

Betty is the soft-spoken one, whose whispery voice hides the steel beneath. Betty loves descriptive language. If a novel doesn’t paint the world and its people, it isn’t worth reading. That’s probably why she captains our literary magazine *The Odyssey*.

Jayne was the coordinator for our Gifted and Talented program, The Max Plan (short for “Maximizing your Potential”), before budget constraints ended it. (We suspect she coerced her daughter into naming Jayne’s first grandchild, Max.) Our #1 sports fan, she coaches our state champion pom and dance team, and was devastated recently when she realized there were no more West De Pere football or basketball games for her to attend.

Georgene is the keeper of our discontent. She cannot tolerate injustice or unfairness, and is unwaveringly unafraid to let the powers that be know how she feels. She is fond of saying, “What are they going to do, fire me?” She also happens to be our resident O.C., like Jack Nicholson in *As Good as it Gets*.

Jane is Comedy Central personified. Her classes sound like they are being taught by “Sybil.” You never know which personality will emerge. She may sing a lilt ing Mr. Rogers style, “Good morning, good morning…” or get in the face of a trouble maker in the hallway and growl a Clint Eastwood challenge, “Make my day…”. With a passion for kids, she moonlights as the youth education director at her church.

Natalie is the new kid on the block. She brings a fresh perspective and the firm belief that teachers can make a difference. It’s an infusion of renewed hope. Natalie began our Loft library with her favorite books. When she heard that some people hadn’t seen *The Princess Bride*, she organized a “PB” Night, a potluck dinner followed by the movie. Change is good.

Sue…I’m the odd one out, the only part time member of the department. After 13 years of teaching, I started a family and decided to teach part time. I have been blessed with the best of both worlds: time with my children, and a career with the brightest, most supportive women I know. I’m known as the crafty one and the shopper. And I’m more than willing to admit to the second.

We are very different. Our perspectives are varied, but our love for teaching and for each other makes us strong. We are unique, yet united. We are lucky. We are the Ladies of the Loft.
Team Planning in the West De Pere “LOFT”  
by Jayne Feldhausen and Natalie Buhl

Note: Many teaching teams plan together at West De Pere, including English 9, taught by four of us, English 10 by four, Early American Literature by two or three, Honors American Literature by two or three, Honors Brit Literature by two or three, and Modern American Literature two or three. This scenario depicts the English 9 team, but they all function similarly.

The session was set for 3:05, but what teacher is ready for a meeting 5 minutes after school ends? Four English 9 teachers bustle around their classrooms, loading themselves up with binders, papers, and folders. At 3:20 Bonnie, carrying her overflowing, oversize binder full of every lesson, sheet, and project she’s used over the past 20 years, enters the designated but still empty meeting room, and calls down the hall for the other three teachers to follow. Within minutes the room becomes alive. Jane enters, already spouting off ideas as she settles in, her bag of Hershey Miniatures spilling onto the empty desk. Natalie, reaching for a Krackel, marvels at Jane’s disorganized folders but remarkably organized brain, and wonders if her own binder will ever take on a life of its own, or if she will ever be as full of ideas as Jane. As the three begin to chat, Jayne peeks in to say she’s on her way but has to start Pom Team practice first.

Within minutes, though only four people occupy the room, seven conversations take place simultaneously. This is team planning. It happens weekly in our department, and for those who share courses, these chaotic yet miraculously productive meeting sessions are the secret to success. Old lessons, projects, and presentations are reviewed and judged—after at least two anecdotes about each. Lots of laughter ensues, but also much serious discussion of what lessons, skills, themes, and concepts are most valuable, necessary, and the ones that are worth eliminating completely (it’s not just kidding).

Best of all, said and done, each teacher knows what each one learned... in the work session... creative, keep us on track... keep kids engaged.

No one is left out, good lessons are repeated, everyone knows what each teacher should have!
valuable, necessary, significant, “life-altering”... Eventually decisions are made on what to do, what to review, what to test, what will work and what to omit completely (usually the “standards and benchmarks”—no, of course not, just kidding).

*Best of all, when all is said and done, everyone knows what each teacher teaches and what each student has learned...these wonderful work sessions keep us creative, keep us fresh, keep us connected, and keep kids together*

Then the division of labor: without hesitation or argument, volunteers speak up:

“I’ll do the discussion sheet and the rubric for the essay. I’ll create a quiz and the homework work sheet.”

“There’s a great sheet from last year; let’s use that.”

“What about Daily Oral Language? I’ll take care of that for all of us.”

“Hey, I don’t have any job yet. How about I run all the copies?”

No one is left out, and no one is overloaded. A week, maybe even two, of really good lessons are ready to go. Best of all, when all is said and done, everyone knows what each teacher teaches and each student has learned—or at least should have!
And these wonderful work sessions keep us creative, keep us fresh, keep us connected, and keep kids together. One last advantage is that if any teacher has a sub, three or four other teachers can explain the day’s lesson to him/her, hopefully not all at the same time.

And, of course, the process doesn’t end when the “planning session” ends and people are leaving—Jane to church or to pick up one of her four children, Jayne to Pom or Forensics, Bonnie to straighten her already perfect room and put up yet another bulletin board, and “novice” Natalie shaking her head, still awed by what just happened. No, it goes on throughout the upcoming days; there are check-ups, revisions, peeks into each other’s rooms to borrow “just one more copy,” or to check out how something worked out. Comparisons are made, conclusions drawn, success stories shared, and, of course, sympathy given when things just don’t go as planned. The group monitors and adjusts constantly.

We are very happy with this method. Our department truly is a TEAM, and our students are fortunate for the teamwork we do. Hilary Clinton once said “It takes a village to raise a child.” Well, at West De Pere High School, it takes a department (or a Loft) to successfully teach a student English!
Three Going on Thirty
by Natalie Buhl

Fresh out of college, I was eager to enter the realm of teaching. To have my own classroom. To set my own rules. To use my own lesson ideas. I was completely prepared for any situation that my first year of teaching would bring. Or so I thought.

I think it took about a week for reality to catch up to me. And then I realized several things. I wasn’t going to change the world overnight. I wasn’t going to get along with all my students. I wasn’t going to plan perfect lessons for every class. I wasn’t going to leave my classroom every day completely fulfilled. I was going to need some help.

Luckily, I was in the right place for finding intelligent, caring, and respected veteran teachers. Surrounding me every day are six of God’s greatest gifts to a new teacher. Over the last three years I’ve begun to realize how blessed I am to have begun my teaching career at West De Pere. Talking with other new teachers, I understand how unique our English department is. Even before my first day at West, I had more support than many first year teachers find throughout their entire first year.

Daily our department, and a few other friends, gather for twenty minutes of frenzied lunch. In those twenty minutes, we discuss everything from American Idol to teaching theories. Although many of the women in our department have children who are my age, rather than making me feel out of place in conversations, they often make me feel protected and cared for – as though they’ve taken me under their wings. Being young doesn’t make me stick out; each member of our department has such a unique personality and style, that “young” just becomes part of my personality and style. Liberal and conservative, reserved and outgoing, rather than letting our differences divided us, we build off each others’ strengths and talents.

Because our department works so closely together, I have found an endless source of inspiration for my own classroom. As a new teacher who can easily become bogged down
with the details of teaching, I cannot imagine teaching without these women. I wouldn’t know where to turn for advice about getting my master’s degree, teaching while raising a family, coaching the forensics team, or even finding a good chiropractor!

In the three years that I’ve been teaching, I have truly come to view my department as members of my extended family. Since I have never experienced teaching anywhere else, I can’t truly appreciate how unique this department is. However, I know that working with these women for the first three years of my teaching career, more so than all of my college education classes combined, has molded me into the teacher I am today. We often joke in our department that no one is allowed to retire until we all decide to leave together. Since many of the women are near the thirty-year mark, and I’m closer to the three-year mark, I hope they’re willing to stick around a bit longer because I’m just getting started!

**Language Arts Classes at West De Pere**

**Required Courses**

**English 9, One Credit**

The first term of this course emphasizes the use of language, grammar review, study of the sentence, personal narrative, 1-3-1 essay, short story, novel, and epic tale, *The Odyssey*. The second term continues to stress grammar review and composition techniques taught the first term and includes non-fiction and drama, including a Shakespearean drama, *Romeo and Juliet*. The course is organized according to themes.

**English 10, One Credit**

This course includes a writing unit, including a review of mechanics, usage, and steps of the composition process. The study of literature focuses both on relationships and aggression and on systems, beliefs, and decisions. An extended unit of speech activities, including the mechanics of speech, preparation of speeches, and presentation of speeches, is included. A Shakespearean drama is studied.

**American Literature Electives**

- Early American Literature
- Modern American Literature
- Honors American Literature

**Other Electives**

- Honors British Literature
- Literature and People Today
- Contemporary Literature
- Future World in Literature
- Literature and the Media
- Creative Writing
- Dramatic Literature
- Public Speaking
- Expository Writing
- Literature and Composition
- College Credit Honors English

In 1993, during an Advanced Placement testing week, I witnessed a reading emergency. None of the students in the “one hour per quarter” approach had read their books! I had a page due on the next Monday. The answer was simple: Read all the time. And, what you want to read, read books!

We’ve been working hard to change the number of pages required weekly for responses or quarterly for the AP classes. We’re looking for a way to fix the requirements in their backpacks instead of getting all of the English 9 and 10 classes to read a book. When one is finished, they simply get given to another active reader and it’s not unusual to hear a “Hey, aren’t you reading?” (or “aren’t you enjoying your reading), but it is unusual.

We are readers as well as teachers, and we teach our students that we have our “I’ve read” lists for our department classes and courses, but we also have some of them have been reading for fun.

Besides Fridays, we read for fun as well. In many courses, and at every grade we’ve added some sort of writing requirement. (Students must read and write about the books they are reading.) Sophomores read novels, and some of them have been reading books with an emphasis on reading for pleasure, a habit which will be developed through class requirements. And, after all, they know the importance of reading, but not just because it’s required.
“What Smart People Do”  
by Bonnie Frechette

In 1993, during an Advanced Writing Project seminar held in York and London, I witnessed a reading program that impressed me. Not a “do one book report each quarter” approach (which translated to: read the book a week before the report was due or read the Spark Notes instead), but a “read ___ pages a week” approach. And have regular in-class reading time each week as well. And each week record a page of notes about what you read. Read regularly. Read weekly. Read all the time. And, an important element, select your own books. Read what you want to read. Read what interests you. And hopefully, get hooked on books!

We’ve been working with that approach ever since. We’ve modified the number of pages required weekly or monthly or quarterly, and the weekly writing responses or quarterly book projects. We are still struggling with the “perfect” fix for the requirements. However, our students are readers. They carry books in their backpacks and actually pull them out to read. Sometimes when they should be doing something else! But they read. They read every Friday in English 9 and 10 classes. They are expected to be reading a book at all times. If one is finished, they start another. On occasion, if some of their 51 minutes are given to another activity, perhaps the wrap-up of Thursday’s lesson, we’ve even heard a “Hey, aren’t we supposed to get Friday for reading?” It’s taken time to change our students’ perspective on reading (and granted, some of them still do not enjoy reading), but most of them are now with us, not against us.

We are readers as well. We read with our students on Fridays. Our students see us reading, hear us discussing books, see us trading books with each other. They have seen our “I’ve read this book and you’ll want to read it as well” shelf in our department classroom/staffroom/library. Some of them have read our books; some of them have brought us books to read, too.

Besides Fridays, we read books in all of our literature and writing classes at all levels. In many courses, we still study one novel with an entire class. In ninth grade we’ve added several “relationships” novels to our “Relationships R Us” unit. (Students must read at least one of them.) In a speech-focused semester, sophomores read novels in a literature circles unit. Later they present special occasion speeches related to these novels. They share one of their “independent reading” books, for which they’ve completed a visual project, in sharing circles. But most important, they are reading. They are developing the habit of reading for pleasure, a habit we hope they’ll carry with them beyond the school year and class requirements. They are part of a reading community here at West De Pere. And, after all, they know that reading is "what smart people do."
Nursing Home Project
by Bonnie Frechette

Folk singer and artist-in residence, Dan Keding, delighted us many years ago with his creative week-long residency at West De Pere High School. He was a down-to-earth, country kind of guy whom everyone loved. When he asked to work with elderly in our community, I jumped at the chance to involve my Creative Writing class. Thus began a tradition that has lasted nearly 20 years.

Yet, meeting and getting to know an elderly resident of a local nursing home is not always the most welcome idea for my writers. Initially they are reluctant to participate. I need to prepare them for this special visit.

Our initial class discussion focuses on their own experiences with nursing homes. Some have been employed at a nursing home; others have visited relatives; some have lost a grandparent; some have never been in a nursing home but have heard horror stories. After this discussion, we spend time reading responses of previous students who’ve participated in this project. We also read and discuss poetry about elderly people. I especially enjoy: “The First Snow of the Year” (Mark Van Doren), “Medicine” (Alice Walker), “Grandmother’s Waltz” (Laura Naramore).

I ask my students what they might want to know about someone older. What are they curious about? Perhaps life during another time or era (WW II, the Depression, one-room schools, growing up on a farm). Perhaps music, fashion, dating, family life. If the individual lived in De Pere all of his/her life, perhaps they can talk about how De Pere has changed. We discuss the interview process. Students ask questions such as: What do I say? What if the person is quiet? What if I run out of questions to ask? I encourage them to look around the resident’s room, searching for clues (a plant perhaps, photos, a piece of furniture, a quilt...) about what’s important in the person’s life.

The nursing home activities director recommends that we simulate “being old” in a variety of hands-on activities: trying to unwrap candy wearing gloves, putting macaroni in our shoes and walking around, buttoning a shirt with one hand (not our dominant one), putting cotton balls in our ears and trying to listen, covering our eyes with plastic bags that distort our vision. We can’t know what it is like to be old, but to begin to understand some of the physical limitations can be helpful. This is fun as well.

My students partner up to plan their interviews. To help them feel more comfortable, two students interview one adult. Although the nursing home is a 15-minute walk away, we walk. This time enables students to think about what they might want to find out, share their nervousness or anxieties, and enjoy the fresh air and the season (January or May), a rare during-the-day treat for us (we have a closed lunch hour). The return walk provides opportunity to share their stories and rehash the experience with friends and classmates.

In class the next day, we each share their story. They are as are the interviews. Dawn met a woman, She asked Dawn why; never got to ask any planned, yet her own questions; in many times after this interview, poetry.

I share my stories as well. All of my students are to write their own interviews. Ed had a framed black and white photo of a man singing behind a piano. I asked about style. I inquired about Ed, and responded, “Yes.” For Ed, a little girl...” several students took the interview! He was older.

Stories of war, poverty, over many feet of stories with real candles or unique. A variety of stories is heard.

Choosing a project for the next session. Poetry captures the imagina- tion of the person in the first person (speaking in the interview). My students walk and interview, going in many directions, sharing with the partner. Some students make up their own. All have gained confidence and knowledge that is unique as each student развивает проект для всех.
and rehash the experience with their partners and classmates.

In class the next day, each twosome tells their story. They are as varied, of course, as are the interviewers and interviewees. Dawn met a woman who loved poetry and commented on the woman’s poetry collection. She asked Dawn to read to her. Dawn never got to ask any of the questions she’d planned, yet her own love of poetry bonded her with the woman. In fact, Dawn returned many times after that to share their mutual love, poetry.

I share my stories as well (after I make sure all of my students are settled and have begun their own interviews, I interview a resident). Ed had a framed black and white photo of a man singing behind a microphone, 1940s style. I inquired about the photo and learned that Ed had been a big band singer. When he asked, “May I sing to you?” of course I responded, “Yes.” He sang an energetic “My little girl...” several times during the brief interview! He was delightful.

Stories of war, poverty, sleigh rides to school over many feet of snow, family Christmases with real candles on the tree, farm life... the variety of stories is endless—and wonderful.

Choosing a project is easy after the sharing session. Poetry capturing an event or emotion of the person interviewed, a narrative in first person (speaking as the person interviewed), my students’ own stories of the walk and interview—the projects created go in many directions. Some are written to be shared with the person interviewed as well. Some students make return visits on their own. All have gained respect for being “old” and knowledge that each older person is as unique as each student is. It is a satisfying project for all involved.

On Being a Student Assistant at West De Pere

According to student Colleen Russell, “Being a student assistant allows me to understand education from a teacher’s perspective.” Building from this perspective, the student assistant develops a relationship “on a different level beyond the normal confines of the classroom.”

Amanda Lindbloom says that “I enjoy being an assistant because of the useful things I am able to do for others, and also the skills that I may learn.”
Idea Journals
By Natalie Buhl

Students who elect to take the Expository Writing class usually aren’t the most motivated writers. They also tend to be apathetic towards the world around them and shy away from discussing their thoughts on any topic. This is where Idea Journals come in. I began teaching Expository Writing three years ago, and when I did, my colleague who had previously taught the class strongly suggested that I include journaling in my classroom routine.

She was right.

A student who is overwhelmed with the idea of writing a four-page definition essay is much more likely to scribble out a few lines about the latest societal controversy. From MTV to CNN, we cover it all. Twice a week I present my class with newspaper clippings – short but controversial stories that get them thinking. Silently they read the articles and formulate thoughts. After reading, they spend about fifteen minutes journaling in a notebook called their “Idea Journal.” Finally, after students have finished writing, our class discusses the article. Sometimes the discussion lasts five minutes; sometimes it lasts twenty. My lessons are always flexible around these discussions. I know better than to cut these kids off once I see them become enthusiastic about something.

The students were so involved in the topic that I knew that my lesson on misplaced modifiers would have to be set aside for the day.

For example, recently I found a news article about the controversy over gay marriages. Knowing the type of student who usually takes this class, I was a bit reluctant to advocate discussion on this topic, but I chose to test my students’ maturity levels and handed out the article. After they wrote for about ten minutes, I opened the discussion, reminding students to choose their words wisely before speaking.

I was amazed at what I heard. The students not only discussed the topic maturely, they brought up points that I had not previously considered. The students were so involved in the topic that I knew my lesson on misplaced modifiers would have to be set aside for the day. With ten minutes left in the period, my mind was reshuffling the rest of my week’s lessons to fit the modifier lesson in later. I’m trying to spark interest and emotion, and I’m trying to teach them how to discuss a topic maturely. To cut that discussion short would make it artificial. Instead, I have to rearrange my lessons and some weeks I don’t get to do much as I’d planned. The greater lesson at times is for students to be concerned.

To assess student journals, I collect their notebooks about every three weeks. The students know that I don’t grade them on spelling, grammar; rather, I look for the development of their ideas. The way they can just write it out. I abstain from commenting too much on their entries; after all, we’ve already had the discussion. However, I do make observations like “Good point!” or “So what?”.

At times, when we are using specific writing techniques like sentence variety, I have them search back through their journals.
to discuss a topic maturely and completely. To cut that discussion short would make it artificial. So some days I have to rearrange my lessons, and some weeks I don't cover as much as I'd planned. But I feel that the greater lesson at times is teaching students to be concerned citizens.

To assess student journals, I collect their notebooks about every three weeks. The students know that I don't grade them on spelling or grammar; rather, I look for the development of their ideas. This way they can just write. I abstain from commenting too much on their entries; after all, we've already had the discussions. However, I do make observations such as "Good point!" or "Say more!"

At times, when we are working on specific writing techniques such as sentence variety, I have students search back through their journals and find examples of simple, compound, and complex sentences as well as gerunds, participial phrases, and appositives. I want them to congratulate themselves when they use good writing skills without even noticing, and I want them to reflect on what it means if they can't find examples of each in their writing. They learn relatively quickly why their writing sounds less mature than their classmates.

My colleague's advice on Idea Journals now seems like a no-brainer. The students are reading, writing, and discussing on a regular basis.

My colleague's advice on Idea Journals now seems like a no-brainer. The students are reading, writing, and discussing on a regular basis. They become educated on current events and trends, and they grow to be comfortable sitting quietly and letting their thoughts flow onto paper. Now writing that four-page essay doesn't seem so overwhelming. After all, they've been doing it all along.
“Experiential” Ideas for Homer’s *Odyssey*
by Jane Johnson

I don’t know about you, but I like to keep things lively in my classroom. (I probably have ADD, but no one had a label for that in the 70’s and 80’s.) I’m going to share some ideas I use with Homer’s *Odyssey* to bring a “classic” back to life. Before we begin, I sometimes give the students a mini-assignment to find out about Greek life back in Homer’s day. This is usually just a two-minute report on the gods, home life, sailing, sports, the arts, or other topics. I also like to serve a little Greek food, like gyros, for students to sample. (Unfortunately, this is the first thing to go if we are short on time.)

Next, I give background on the selection. To help them get the idea of the length of the voyage and what it was like to be one of Odysseus’ men, I have them sit on the floor in pairs and create a long row across the room; then, they must row in time by a beat created by myself (because I am the captain, of course!). Also, I make them wear life jackets made out of construction paper because I will have no drownings in my room!

During the reading of the literature, I try to come up with “experiential” lessons to bring each stop on the voyage to life. For example, they get a flower for the lotus eaters; we tape eyeballs in the center of our foreheads for the Cyclops; I have them make a large circle and rotate around me as I squirt them with a water toy for Charybdis; for the Sirens, I hang Barbie dolls in the room and sound a toy “siren.” It’s all rather silly, but I guarantee they remember many more details than they did when we simply read the selection. It’s also fun to keep a passbook with pictures, details, mementos for each stop along the way. It’s just a different way to take notes, but they seem to like it.

Since we use *The Odyssey* during our Heroes unit, I have students keep track of heroic and non-heroic traits in their passbooks as well. These things have helped to keep me into this piece of literature as much as the students! I have fun coming up with new ideas each year. Perhaps you have some you could share with me?

Future World Throt is primarily a science fiction, but I have developed for my class a curriculum meant to help students analyze the science fiction, look at the implications of the different themes unique to the genre, and ultimately create their own science fiction.

We try to combine the science with the serious analysis. By using the novel *Man and Technol* as a basis for the students to try their hand at creating a futuristic story like scientific or technology. The catch is that they must not only describe the “future,” but they must complete with understanding.
Future World Through Literature is primarily a science fiction class. As a result, the projects that I have developed for this class are meant to help students analyze science fiction, look at the thematic implications of the literature and themes unique to this class, and to ultimately create their own science fiction.

We try to combine fun with serious analysis. Early in the "Man and Technology" unit, I ask the students to try their hand at creating a futuristic science fiction-like scientific or technological gadget or development. The catch is that they must also not only describe the "development," usually complete with illustrations, but they must also include a descriptive list of positive social implications and negative social implications. The "audience" often has fun outdoing the presenter, anticipating implications, and in the process the students begin to think like science fiction writers and see the serious side of science fiction.

Later on in the same unit, students research a "futuristic" scientific advancement, again including not only a description of their topics, but also including a descriptive list of the positive and negative implications. The "audience" often has fun outdoing the presenter, anticipating implications, and in the process the students begin to think like science fiction writers and see the serious side of science fiction.

Some of their research topics have included developments in nanotechnology, cybernetics, and biological weapons. It's fun to listen to students anticipate the positive and negative social and ethical implications of potential developments such as facial transplants. By this time, after reading quite a few stories in the unit, they are ready to plan and develop their own science fiction short story, complete with underlying thematic development.
 Controlled Societies, another of our units in this class, involves exploring dystopian literature. A helpful introductory project involves groups creating a plan for a “perfect” society and then trying to convince us why all of the trade-offs in terms of individual and societal controls are necessary to achieve the ultimate “good.” Often, the key for a group as they create their plan is deciding what is essential to a “perfect” society and then determining just how far they will go to achieve it, together with all justifications. It’s amazing how quickly the plans turn into dystopian societies in their own right.

Possibly the projects the students enjoy the most are included in the Space and Alien Encounters unit. Early in the unit, students begin to learn about and visualize the potential of space, planets in our galaxy, and other hypothetical phenomena. Some web sites include the absolutely amazing photographs taken by the Hubble telescope. Here, students can not only learn about space but also take notes that include both factual information and descriptive imagery. Their notes often become the basis of quite interesting poetry. Later on, since this is a science fiction class, students write a story about a planet (in any galaxy of their choice) and an alien life form that can survive on existing materials on the planet. Besides outlining the basics of their setting (location, atmosphere, moons, gravity, life forms, ecology) and alien life form (appearance, physical characteristics, communication methods, life cycle, values, beliefs), some further research is necessary to get ready to write the story. It helps to have resources such as Barlowe’s Guide to Extraterrestrials that include visuals as well as descriptions of the alien life forms created by science fiction writers such as Frank Herbert and Arthur C. Clarke. It’s easy to see that the imagination has no limits.

The most integral part of the course is the reading and study of science fiction itself. I struggled at first to find the most effective texts all students would enjoy. While we read many short stories, some of which come from an anthology entitled You and
Science Fiction, students seem to enjoy reading science fiction novels the most. Soon, I realized that students themselves are in the best position to select the novels that suit their comfort level. Today, independent reading of science fiction (see "Read: What Smart People Do" by Bonnie Frechette) is a major component of the course. As a result, some students may choose to read 1984 and Brave New World, while others read The Giver and Flowers for Algernon. By choosing their own novels, with the support of an extensive suggested reading list and a classroom collection of science fiction novels, students not only enjoy the reading (for the most part!), but they often select challenging novels.

Through this course students not only enjoy science fiction, but they will also begin to think about some of the issues that confront our society. My hope is that through this course students will not only enjoy science fiction, but also begin to think about some of the issues that confront our society. Good science fiction is often critical and cautionary at heart. While students may not ultimately accept Isaac Asimov’s belief that science fiction is “the most important of all literature,” I do hope that it will serve as a springboard to reading and also to a deep and honest reflection about the nature of our society.
“You Are What You See”
by Georgene Lindbeck

“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” I wonder if Dickens would have written this about our media-driven world today. I love movies, books, music and television, and have been enlightened and inspired by them all; however, I also think it is important for our students to see the effects of the media on their lives. Therefore, I’ve focused my Literature and Media class around this connection, trying to help my students become critical of the media’s effects, both good and bad, on their lives.

The first day of each new semester, I ask my students to tell me who they are today as a result of the media. I usually get the same answers, mainly regarding their choices in entertainment and their choices in the clothes they buy. Inevitably, most say that they are basically untouched by the media; they make their own choices, have their own thoughts. Throughout my course, I try to help them come up with a more complete answer. The goal of my course is to aid my students in becoming more critical consumers of the mass media. We study the concept of acculturation in order to recognize that the media are becoming as important, some may argue more important, than the social institutions—the family, church, schools and traditions in our society—that have been the framework of passing on our values, expectations, social standards and taboos.

I attempt to help them analyze the way traditional values are fighting for survival with the pervasive media values that make them value quantity over quality, youth over age and wisdom, glamour over beauty. They begin to think about how their attitudes, expectations, ethics, values, and self-images are shaped by media now. Is there something wrong with them not to understand the spans and “change” education to their

It’s rewarding to see so many students now realize it’s not just a soap opera they are

Or when they read Cindy Crawford

They begin to realize the

It’s rewarding to see them take

shower every day

sell more soap. It’s

One of the strengths

students connect

I ask them each to

because of the media,

all drawing connections to

the “best of times”
shaped by media messages which need to make them believe there is something wrong with them that can be fixed—quickly—by buying a product. They begin to understand the deception in the media that makes them dislike the bodies they have, believe the stereotypes they hold, and develop the short attention spans and “change the channel” mentality that influence everything from their education to their relationships.

It’s rewarding to see the light bulbs go on when they learn Julia Roberts had to have body doubles in *Pretty Woman* because her body wasn’t good enough. Or when they realize that hours of computer work shaved inches and wrinkles off Cindy Crawford for a magazine cover; she wasn’t good enough, either. They begin to realize the perfection they strive for doesn’t exist, anywhere. It’s rewarding to see the light bulbs flash when they learn that the reason they take showers every day, *must* take showers everyday, is because Lifebuoy needed to sell more soap. It’s rewarding to see them better understand how their world is reflected by, but also shaped by, books, movies, song lyrics and advertising.

One of the strengths I see in our department is the constant attempt to help the students connect to their world, to understand who they are. The last question I ask them each semester is the same I asked them the first day. “Who are you because of the media?” Their answers are my reward, for at this point they are all drawing connections between our course material and their world, exploring the “best of times” and the “worst of times” through English.
A Sampling of Lit and Media Projects
by Georgene Lindbeck

I love the show *The Apprentice*. I love the way teams are assigned tasks which make them apply their basic knowledge in creative ways to win a competition. A few months ago, Donald Trump asked his teams to create an ad campaign for a private charter plane service. I loved it! This is one project I ask my students to do, and if it's good enough for Donald Trump . . . .

My Literature and Media students, however, did not promote a plane service. My four classes voted to come up with campaigns to try to win a contract with the marshmallow industry. (Last year, it was bananas!) Eighteen agencies came up with unique and interesting campaigns. Their class presentation to the company (my class) had to be persuasive and complete (including a print ad, a television ad, slogan, storyboard, explanation of appeals and claims, logo, and choice of publications and time slots) and aimed at a target audience. I loved how one group of five boys came in dressed in suits and ties, giving a professional and fun presentation. Another ad group emptied the grocery stores in town of marshmallows.

Another project Lit and Media students must do is create and write a magazine. Again, they're in teams vying for “Best Magazine,” “Best Writing,” and “Best Cover.” Again, target audience is important in their choice of cover, title, word choice, story selection and advertising. Students love this assignment because they are able to write about what interests them. Even students who hate to write do great jobs when they can write about cars, sports, beauty secrets and a host of other topics. I've had tabloids with clever satire, children's magazines, “teen girl” magazines, music magazines, even a West De Pere High School magazine which included a picture of every senior, sometimes plopped on the head of a star's body. It's amazing what students are able to do today. The first magazines from about ten years ago were hand-written and drawn; now, using computer technology, they are almost professional.

Probably the project my students look forward to most is the film project. Here, they also do writing in correct format (the script), advertising (an advance poster), and the film itself. Although this is fun, it is not easy. Students must apply correct order of shots, various camera angles, use of color, composition and sound. They often try their hand at special visual and audio effects, and their movies are timed within seconds. Students sometimes spend one hundred or more hours just on editing. They have to do all the work outside the classroom, in teams. Most are willing to give a lot of themselves, even to the point of spending their own money.

As students learn to use computer special effects and editing programs, the films are becoming more and more amazing. I'm really technologically disadvantaged, but the students learn on their own. I basically give them the opportunity
and the tools. On the days of the premieres, my classroom is full of students from other classes. It's become quite a must see. Because they are in competition, and because they know future classes will see their work as models, students seem to outdo the last year's class every year. For me, the fun comes in seeing their pride in the final products and running into students I had ten years ago who say, "Do you remember my movie? We still talk about making that!"
Bringing the Classics to Life
by Jayne Feldhausen

All students from every level like to have fun, so I am always looking for ideas that will involve every student, demand knowledge, and increase understanding of what we are covering in class. Role-playing activities make a literary work more real and more relevant to students. I doubt these are original, but they have worked for me.

College Credit Honors English:

"Putting Oedipus on Trial"

Early in our discussion of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, I ask the students what their responses would be if I asked, "Is Oedipus guilty of killing his father and marrying his mother?" I refuse to explain any more about that question; I merely require that they make a choice. Then I divide them into two groups according to this choice. Their assignment is to prepare a court case: prosecution or defense for Oedipus on this issue.

Anything is fair game in the presentation. People can appear from the dead, gods and goddesses can testify, each side can use a different Oedipus (one who appears as a repentant victim, the other who is an arrogant, hot-tempered tyrant), and some modern variations (such as DNA specialists) are allowed.

Each side has to pick lawyers to open the trial, interrogate witnesses and provide closing arguments. Other students act as witnesses, writing out both the questions and their answers for the lawyers to use. Quotes from the play are recommended whenever possible. Appropriate costumes and props are often used (you would be amazed at the expertise these kids have in creating togas!). We call in an outside jury (usually fellow teachers, administrators, student teachers).

Although I have done this activity for many years, I am always amazed at the incredible job the students do. Those who act as jurors are in for a remarkably enjoyable and revealing experience. The student actors totally get into it, and by the time we are done, everyone KNOWS the play and has strong opinions on it!

As for the evaluation, I grade each side as a group, but also give individual grades for their knowledge of the play, creativity in arguing their side, costumes, props, effort, insight, and anything else that comes into play. I do most of my grading while watching and taking notes. Although I do ask that they hand in any written scripts or note cards, my grade is mostly for the presentation.

Eleventh Grade

An Opera or Jenny

For Othello I use the question "My Man Is Too Jealous," and have students pretend to be situations, analyze role of degree of modern in

For Hester Prynne fair as need someone to play create the list of characters to be each main character and children. They should answer well as their answer (The questions and accept the questions, and "I have an opinion on this."

...
Eleventh Grade Literature:

*An Oprah or Jenny Jones or Maury Pauvich Show Starring Othello or Hester Prynne*

For *Othello* I use the Maury Pauvich set up and call the program “Woe Is Me; My Man Is Too Jealous.” You need a student or two to play the host. Then I have students pretend to be characters from the play called upon to explain the situations, analyze reasons, give advice, and make observations. I allow a certain degree of modern interpretation.

For Hester Prynne from *A Scarlet Letter*, I also use a Maury Pauvich set-up and call the program “Scarlet Children: Who Should Raise Them.” Once again you need someone to play the host. This person will write the show’s introduction, create the list of guests, and ask the questions. Then I have students sign up to be each main character from the book, as well as average townspeople, women and children. They all are to create questions for “Maury” to ask them as well as their answers which tell who they think should raise Pearl and why. (The questions and answers go on separate sheets so that the host can have the questions, and “characters” will have their answers.) Even Pearl can have an opinion on this. Quotes should be used, but a lot of the dialogue requires imagination.

**Time Requirements:**

½ class period to explain the assignment
1 ½ class periods for student preparation
1 class period for the exercise

I’ve done both of these with varying success (but I gave up on *Jerry Springer* after only one try). The *Othello* trial done by College Credit Honors English works better, but either class can be eye-opening if you have enough students who are willing to take part.
Make It a Challenge
by Jayne Feldhausen

I have always believed that the best gifted education is a challenging course. Yet creating such a class, with a rigorous curriculum, high standards, and motivated students is not easy. Somehow through the years we have managed to keep our juniors and seniors interested enough to sign up for and to achieve in our honors electives.

It has been my honor and privilege to teach the senior elective known as College Credit Honors English. The preparation for this class takes time and effort, and the correcting load is heavy because these students deserve nothing but the best and because they write often and really care about their teacher’s critique of their work. However, these are the only drawbacks. My experience in this course over the years has been pure joy.

The course is run through St. Norbert College, so the students earn college credit to almost any Wisconsin school, as well as many out-of-state colleges. This gives the students incentive, and since I use college grades, they also get insight into college expectations. In order to allay any “grade point average fears,” I make their grades one letter higher for the high school than they are for the college. The fact that the course has a college curriculum also seems to impress the students. Most smart kids want to learn new things. We cover classic drama first semester including Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen, O’Neill, Miller, Williams, and Albee. We also cover literary theory, criticism, psychology, philosophy and history, most of which are new to students so they feel both challenged and “intellectual.” Since this first semester is actually called “English Composition,” students write quite a bit, too, and eventually come to use secondary sources with ease.

The second semester is designated by St Norbert College as “Introduction to Literature.” Short stories, novels and poetry are analyzed, with the overriding questions being “What makes something quality literature?” Students learn the literary terminology of writers, and are asked “how” a literary piece works rather than what it’s about. I’d like to expound a little on this because it is a unit I find satisfying to teach.

Quite often we teachers tell students what great literature is, which poems are truly quality, which works can be deemed “classic” and so on. Sometimes students just agree; sometimes they decide that if the teacher says it’s “great stuff,” it will probably be “hard and boring.” It seems that, by senior year in a class of bright students, it’s time to let the students explore this question. Consequently, I begin the course with a variety of short stories, some classic—some, well, “not.” But I do not tell them which is which. One would think it would be obvious; however, this is not the case.
For example: there are three stories available in The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature which give students a chance to tangle with the “classic” question. They are “The Story of an Hour,” by Kate Chopin, “A Sorrowful Woman,” by Gail Godwin, and “A Secret Sorrow,” by Karen Van Der Zee. All three deal with young women facing tragedy. The first two are, of course, the “quality fiction.” The third is a cutting from a Harlequin romance. The Bedford book actually uses it as an example of “Formula Fiction.” I simply ask which stories are truly “literature.”

Many girls LOVE the Harlequin romance; some find it “cheesy in the extreme.” This variance forces those who thought it to be quality, to defend it or at least answer the charges against it. Sometimes students are embarrassed that they didn’t read the explanations provided by the editors which pretty much condemn it and praise the other two. The textbook does admit, however, that Harlequin Books is a major publisher which has sold over a billion copies of its romances—enough for about 20% of the world population. Clearly many people enjoy them. And of course there is a place in this world for good “escape” literature and for books that entertain. So what then is the purpose of quality literature? Isn’t it also entertaining and capable of helping one escape? Eventually interesting comparisons are made between driving a Honda Civic as opposed to a Mercedes, or watching That ’70s Show versus The West Wing.

As we continue reading, the class compiles a list of characteristics of “quality literature” and at the end of it all, they are asked to write an essay in which they define literature and use three examples to prove their definition.

The question of “HOW” literature works is a concept stolen from John Ciardi’s wonderful, old book, How Does a Poem Mean. I base my classes around large sections of this text. We talk about what a given poem means, but we also talk about literary techniques, devices, diction, and syntax. We look at the “engine” of the work, so to speak. We try to use the language of the critic and the “jargon” of the expert. Eventually, students gain far more respect for the writer’s craft when we do this thorough investigation. Through it all our motto is this quote from Ciardi: “The only reason for taking a poem apart is that it may then be put back together again more richly.” The usual “poetry skeptics and cynics” (you know who I mean—but I’ll avoid stereotyping), come around to respect the craft and even find some poems and poets they actually like!

The writing this semester is more expressive and creative than the documented, interpretive essays of first semester. Students keep a portfolio of open-ended writing assignments. And at the end of the poetry unit, each student has to pick and present a poet of their choice. Their presentation covers the usual: biographical information, style, influences, a poem explication and some sort of visual, creative format. These presentations have become the highlight of the semester—so “stellar” in fact that students from other classes actually come to watch.
The more complex the literature and the more serious the curriculum, the more the students seem to respond. They challenge one another too. Everyone comes prepared -- or risks being playfully teased by their peers. And there is still plenty of time for fun. Every review game, literary debate, role-playing session, or creative project brings out the best and the humorous! Students really enjoy being with other students who care and all want to study and learn. They suffer together and they succeed together. They “bond” so to speak. Ultimately, there is nothing really magical about the class’s success. Perhaps because students elected to take it, the course works, and you find yourself in the kind of class you always dreamed about teaching.

Collaboration with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

Among the electives students can choose in their final two years at West De Pere is Expository Writing. The course involves a number of traditional nonfiction essay assignments with practical workplace writing. The current teacher takes special pride in an assignment which hones student skills in process writing, in which students design a board game and their fellow students assess its playability. Clearly, the faculty take advantage of opportunities for teaching innovation.

At the same time, the course is carefully designed to match curriculum at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College. Students who enroll in expository writing, which is described in the course catalog as “geared toward careers and employability,” can earn credit for an introductory writing course at NWTC if they earn a “B” or better. Students who are not likely to attend a four-year college, then, can still find reward for success at West De Pere.
Students Shine at Readers Theater
by Sue Robertson

Awareness of the pressure placed on educators to enhance our image in the community has prompted me to share a project done in Public Speaking. It provides broad-based community appeal while meeting several state standards. Some of the standards addressed in this semester long course include research and its use in informative and persuasive speeches, organization of information, the use of clear, forceful and figurative language, communication theory, and critical listening. The unit I’d like to share is strictly presentation based. The culmination is forty minutes of Reader’s Theater for Children performed at local public and private elementary and special needs schools. Invitations to the performance are extended to the parents of my students...hence the broad-based appeal. A brief overview of instructor preparation, student requirements, the time frame, and assessment may be enough to help you determine if the unit is right for you.

I prepare for this project by first locating copies of the children’s stories with dialogue and action and more than four characters. Lengthy selections will need to be cut or edited, as will extraneous “He said...” and “She said...” narration, once the characters have been established. Some narrative stories and poems require dividing the manuscript into character and narrator roles—enough to give every student a speaking part. More than one story may be used to give everyone a part. I find the Disney version of Cinderella a good choice because it has many characters (8). Other titles are listed below.

The next step is to make user friendly copies in script format. (Be sure to check copyright laws.) All action (blocking), gestures and use of props must be determined before students are given their copies. Decide early how much costuming will be involved. Since this is Reader’s Theater, I use music stands borrowed from our music department to hold the scripts. They are easy to transport on the bus and easily stored in my room when not in use. Finally, the venue, the date, and the time for the presentation have to be established. I try to schedule the performance during my class period, at least partly, in order to minimize student release from classes and my need for a sub.

With the prep work complete, the auditions begin. Each student receives a copy of the script and is required to read short selections chosen by the instructor. Every student is given a chance to audition for every role. In addition, for extra credit, students may prepare (individually or in groups) to audition solo or small group pieces of their own choosing. They may even incorporate musical, dance or puppetry talents. Some of my, now standard, favorite pieces were first thought of by students.

Students are responsible for their own costumes and props. They are also required to wear dress casual clothing to the presentation. Other requirements
include: daily participation, assignments for transporting props and costumes, parental permission slips, and daily work on the final persuasive speech. Since all rehearsals take place during class, I plan the Readers Theater project to precede the final speech. Students may use all non-rehearsal time to prepare the persuasive speech which will be due shortly after the Reader’s Theater presentation.

A minimum of three days are needed for auditions. Since participation is mandatory, everyone must audition for appropriate roles. (Please note, however, no student will be forced to audition for a role with which he or she feels uncomfortable.) Gender is taken into consideration, but voice and physical appearance are far more important. For example, while Cinderella calls for a stepmother and two stepsisters, the characters are much funnier when portrayed by males using falsetto voices and wearing wigs, gowns and bulky boots.

Day four will involve the assignment of parts, costumes, and props. Days five through eight find each group of readers meeting with the instructor for a run-through of the story and the blocking. Day nine is the start of rehearsals. All costumes and props are used for every run-through (days nine through thirteen). The day before the performance is a formal dress rehearsal. A forty-minute performance, plus travel and set up time, usually requires a short-term sub for the instructor and a release for students from one class. The day following the presentation is set aside for returning scripts, costumes and props. Students receive their unit assessments as well.

Assessment is based on a variety of skills and activities, most of which were discussed earlier. Enthusiastic participation in the auditions and rehearsals counts heavily, usually 20% for the auditions and 25% to 30% for the rehearsals. Having permission slips, costumes, and props will count approximately 5% each. Performing assigned jobs and dressing appropriately for the presentation are usually worth 10% each. Displaying the learned audible and visible skills in the performance is a necessary part of the assessment—usually 15% to 20%. There is a lot of room for variation.

I wish I could convey to you how much my students love this unit and learn from it. It’s clear that every student has made gains in: timing, the use of audience feedback, vocal and physical characterization, audible and visible speaking skills, blocking, and handling props in a live presentation. We also perform some choreographed song and dance routines. We post digital pictures of our performance on our school website and send articles to our local paper and our district newsletter. Personally, I love the hand drawn and awkwardly lettered thank you notes we receive from the children we’ve entertained. This unit simply reinforces my belief in the power of communication.

If you would like a copy of the stories we use, or if you have questions, please e-mail me at robsuetr@wdpsd.com.
SELECTIONS from READERS THEATER

Christmas with Morris and Bovis
by Bernard Wiseman

Morris the Moose Goes to School
by Bernard Wiseman

Disney's Cinderella. Random House, New York

The Berenstain Bears
by Jan and Stan Berenstain (various books)

’Twas the Night Before Christmas on Sesame Street
Jim Henson Productions

Cookie Monster and the Cookie Tree
by David Korr, Children's Television Workshop

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
by Judith Viorst

The Magic Fish
by Freya Littledale

Stand Back Said the Elephant
by Elfrida Vipont
Excellence Across and Outside the Curriculum
by David Beard

An excellent program in English Language Arts cannot exist in isolation. West De Pere High School has made excellent connections between their own work and the successful work of other faculty in other units (Business Education and Art) in their extra-curricular activities. From the Odyssey to the Phantom to the Drama Club, Language Arts has reached out to touch its students' lives.

The Odyssey

Ms. Bienash, faculty advisor of the Odyssey, has made the school literary magazine into a locus of interdepartmental collaboration and national recognition. The Odyssey is edited by students, who learn valuable skills organizing the Odyssey staff, selecting material, editing and encouraging possible revision with new authors, and collaborating with students in other departments.

This year's students have made making the Odyssey visible to the broader De Pere community a goal, and have organized coffeehouse readings in the community. The Odyssey has been recognized by NCTE several years running for its overall quality as a literary magazine. As collaboration with other departments grows and continues, its quality will only rise.

Ms. McArt (rmcart@wdpsd.com), of the Business Education faculty, has worked with Ms. Bienash in producing the Odyssey. McArt recommends students for the production staff of the Odyssey. These students work for a half-credit assistantship, producing the camera-ready copy of the Odyssey for the printers. Developing these skills in desktop publishing is part of McArt's aim in producing communication-capable students through courses like Desktop Presentations, Digital Imaging, and Internet and Web Publishing. Indeed, these students place the Odyssey online each year, taking advantage of McArt's role as webmaster for the school to make the award-winning journal available widely. It's heartening to see Language Arts and Business Education faculty work so fruitfully together.

Mr. Dolan (sdolan@wdpsd.com), the new faculty member in Art, has picked up a tradition of collaboration between the Art Department and the school literary magazine. Dolan has integrated art exercises inspired by creative writing into his classes, allowing students to explore the relationships between visual and literary arts. In 2003-2004, he has made submission of a cover design for the Odyssey a course requirement. The Odyssey is the beginning, Dolan hopes, of integrating art, language arts, and business education into a meaningful set of experiences for students.

Drama Club

Drama is an expanding area at West De Pere. Ms. Johnson, believe that belief with her students. Drama club typically has twice gone to New York City! These leaders organized 2003-2004 was a special year! one-act play competition is awarded only to play the best by a panel of judges. This was a year of recognition!

Ms. Johnson is excited to offer a Theater Arts course in the Language Arts area's extracurricular curriculum at West De Pere High School.
Drama Club

Drama is an expanding area at West De Pere. The advisor to the Drama Club, Ms. Johnson, believes that theater has the power to change the world and shares that belief with her students.

Drama club typically attracts 35 students, from which three leaders are selected. These leaders organize field trips, publicity, and other club activities. The club has twice gone to New York City with between 15-20 students each time.

2003-2004 was a special year for the Drama Club, as the club's entry into state one-act play competition took Critic's Choice. The Critic's Choice designation is awarded only to plays which uniformly receive the highest rating from state judges. This was a real coup for the students who prepared and performed "May I Have Your Attention, Please?"

Ms. Johnson is excited about the growth of interest in Theater Arts, and hopes to offer a Theater Arts elective (as an option in the Fine Arts area, rather than the Language Arts area) in the near future. Clearly, Theater is reaching across the curriculum at West De Pere.
We Have Class Out of Class Too
By Betty Bienash

“You are the author of your own life story.” Poke your head into any English classroom up here in the Loft, perhaps at 7:30 in the morning when the Phantom Times newspaper staff meets for an early morning planning session or at 3:00 when the Odyssey, our literary magazine staff, meets to read student submissions, and you will find students who are stepping up to this challenge.

Forensics, the newspaper, one-act play, student mentoring program, drama club, literary magazine, all-school play, English Academic Team—the list of extracurriculars we as members of the English team are involved in seems endless. No matter how different the activities and opportunities, they all contribute to a common good. Our students have a chance to get to know us outside of the classroom, and each student has an opportunity to truly excel, to spread wings and tap into sometimes hidden potential.

The student-mentoring program, which was developed and is advised by a member of our department, is just such an opportunity. Imagine a senior becoming a close confidant of a freshman, helping guide an underclassman through the treacherous waters of his or her freshman year. It is a win-win situation, for both have an opportunity to learn more about themselves with the support of a partner who willingly shares some of his own experiences or her expertise in human relationships.

Or picture the newspaper staff as it meets each week and works together to produce a Phantom Times issue each month. Yes, they work closely under the guidance of their advisor, and together they share many moments of joy and frustration, but ultimately, the students themselves are responsible for all the writing, editing, and layout. They take ownership for the development and content of the student newspaper as they try to capture student life here at West De Pere.

The newspaper staff’s big fundraiser is called WestStock. There is an amazing amount of work involved in pulling together a concert of student bands (band selection, T-shirt design and sales, security, etc.), but the neatest part of it all is the bonding and all-out fun the kids have in developing and simply being part of the event.

Probably no one needs to tell us that experience is the best teacher. This is especially true for forensics, one-act play, and the all-school play. Working closely with their advisors, students ultimately gain in self-confidence and enhance their communication skills, and so much more, by simply “doing.” No class can quite compare to the agony and joy of conquering stage fright, stepping into the “lights” (on stage or in front of a classroom during forensics competition), or delivering the performance of a lifetime. And no small part of this experience is working closely as a teacher/mentor side by side with students from tryouts to production (and so on).

Finally, stop by on Friday afternoons to hear the Phantom Times class of the magazine in action as it produces a new issue. By participating in the program, incorporating your input in the student selection of material, or helping the class promote school’s Activities Day, you will help celebrate the text, art, and imagery created by students for the Author’s Aloud, Spoken Word, and Video Festivals. We look forward to hearing how much they have grown over the past year, and hope you will join in the works for this year’s events. The following is a condensed list of some of the events.

A poster on the wall proclaims, “You are the author of your own life story.” Here at West De Pere, students face the challenges in the classroom and on the stage, and teachers to be present and be a part of it all.
production (and sometimes state competition).

Finally, stop by on a Wednesday at 3:00 for an Odyssey meeting. Just like the Phantom Times, our student literary magazine is a publication where the selection of materials, the editing, the layout, and the publication are the ultimate responsibility of the student editors and staff. Above all, the very philosophy of the magazine is to promote and encourage excellence in student writing and artwork. By participating in the NCTE Excellence in Student Publications program, incorporating the magazine directly in our classes by using "published" student selections as writing models, recognizing staff, writers, and artists at our school’s Activities Awards Night (and of course by hosting an ice cream social to celebrate the magazine’s publication), we try to do just this. Perhaps, though, Author’s Aloud, which the students came up with entirely on their own, shows how much they have made writing a part of their lives. So far, the students have held two Author’s Aloud evenings at Freddie, a local coffee house, with a third in the works for April, where they have read their own poetry and stories, listened to one another’s pieces, and simply laughed and had a good time together.

A poster on the wall in one of our classrooms says, “You are the author of your own life story.” It is our desire to see our students succeed and to step up to the challenges in their lives. Certainly, the many activities we are privileged as teachers to be part of help them do just this.
Editor's Note: Two student essays were submitted for inclusion in this issue. Interestingly, both had very similar praise about how WDPHS's English department inspired the writers to love English and to want to pursue the study of it in college. Since we received Stephanie's first, we're printing it pretty much in its entirety; excerpts of Carrie Lorig's appear in the textboxes.

The Perks of Being an English Nerd
by Stephanie Voight, Grade 12

School is a subject that's not to be taken lightly with me. In fact, it makes me downright ornery. If you said school lunch, I'd probably make your stomach feel as if you'd eaten one. If you said "homework, " I'd probably glare at you until your face turned colors of my satisfaction. But, in a paradox that is complex to even me, if you said "English," I'd curl my arms around your unsuspecting legs and demand you take me to it.

I can't blame this entirely on the fact that I enjoyed books even as a child. Back then, reading wasn't required; it was entertainment. It wasn't... homework. Now don't get me wrong. I liked counting money when I was a kid, but math homework has been and always will be just... math homework. English homework, however, is a different story.

Real English homework started my freshman year. The first assignment was... shocking. Mrs. Frechette asked us to make a collage using our initials. I remember thinking to myself, "A collage? What? No vocabulary pre-test? No haiku about being a freshman?" Fresh out of a parochial school and obsessed with A's, I spent hours on my collage; it had to be perfect. Besides, it was the first assignment of the year. I got an A and a "wow." That was just the beginning.

My freshman year really ignited my adoration of English. I distinctly remember my Hero speech about my grandfather. (This was the first time I was verbally accused of being an English nerd. Three years later, I accept the compliment graciously.) Eventually I read the speech to my grandfather on his 80th birthday, and to see him tear up and hug me tighter than ever was well worth the three minutes of shaking and stuttering in front of my classmates.

Most significantly my freshman year was my first encounter with the legendary Shakespeare. I particularly remember the awe at his popular love story that ended, much to my disappointment, in suicide--a powerful finale I didn't quite grasp until this year. The year also included my first experience with acting in a One Act drama, directed by Mrs. Johnson, that went to State. I proudly claimed the role of an extra and was thrilled to fill in for a friend's role on parents' night: I had two lines, and I practiced them relentlessly for two hours!

One of the first things I studied in Ms. Frechette's Freshman English class was Romeo and Juliet. Now everyone knows that Shakespeare is, above all, a man, but I always believed only adults could understand him. . . . I enjoyed loving the play and Shakespeare, but the thought of writing a paper was . . . dreadful. At the time, I didn't realize how much anticipation is a part of it.

Our teachers broke us through it, piece by piece. Ms. Frechette encouraged us to work around the formality of a paper and squeeze some creativity into our writing. I learned: When you do work, everyone has the same questions and you have the same answer on a paper, however you look into a piece of writing, and in turn, myself.
One of the first things we studied in Ms. Frechette's Freshman English class was Romeo and Juliet. Now everyone knows who Shakespeare is, even freshmen, but I always thought only adults could understand him. . . . I ended up loving the play and Shakespeare, but the thought of writing a paper was still dreadful. At the time I didn't realize how much interpretation is a part of reading. Our teachers brought us through it, piece by piece. Ms. Frechette encouraged us to work around the formality of a paper and squeeze some creativity into our writing. I liked that. When you do worksheets, everyone has the same questions and you have to have the same answers. In a paper, however, I had to look into a piece of writing and in turn, myself.

--Carrie Lorig

My sophomore year was divided between the crazy classroom environment of Mrs. Johnson and the perky classroom environment of Mrs. Frechette. The first day of Mrs. Johnson's English 10 consisted of an entertaining tour of her room. "And this is my poster!" I don't think I've ever laughed so hard in a classroom, especially when the source was a teacher! The memory that is most vivid from English 10 is acting out Macbeth with witch caps.

The second half of sophomore year was probably the most exciting semester of English ever. Activities ranged from a lip sync (my group did "Secret Agent Man," and we still talk about it), a skit, an impromptu speech, an advertisement for a story, and literature circles. I also joined Forensics with Mrs. Feldhausen as my coach. My group interpretation received a gold medal at State. (After that day, coincidentally, I set my heart on going to Madison.)

Somewhere between To Kill a Mockingbird and Huckleberry Finn, I became obsessed with English. I once even skipped a school dance to spend an entire evening reading poetry in Barnes and Noble with a fellow English Nerd. As a junior, I enrolled in Honors American Literature and Honors British Literature and had Mrs. Johnson for both courses. In addition to learning how to write a real essay (a task I loathed at the time), I read multiple brilliant pieces of literature. Brave New World had an especially intense impact on me. Initially (ashamed as I am to say this), I believed that Huxley's future world would be superior to our current world. However, when a Mrs. Johnson assignment required me to place myself in the position of an Epsilon, I quickly discovered the bleak and unfortunate life of my "rank."

Being a senior meant freedom. "The Loft," the English teacher haven, became a haven
for me as well. In Public Speaking, taught by Mrs. Robertson, in addition to listening to the hilarious array of speeches presented by my peers, my class learned numerous aspects of speaking that I hadn’t even considered. We took on the responsibility of reading the announcements (talk about an audience!) and presenting a Reader’s Theater to an elementary school. I also took Literature and Media, taught by Mrs. Lindbeck, one of the most unique teachers I have ever encountered, who has a distinct personality that is enticing and entertaining. I loved that class for the physical proof that I took it: I made my own fifteen-minute movie, a commercial, and a magazine.

I also landed in Creative Writing with Mrs. Frechette. After only a quarter, I’ve already completed my first ever short story (a feat I had attempted to accomplish multiple times on my own). With the aid of a new technique (a “character log”), I revolutionized the way I had written in the past: I became the main character.

Last, but certainly not least, I enrolled in Mrs. Feldhausen’s College Credit Honors English. The first semester consisted of writing several essays and a deep exploration of plays, including tragedy. My friends won’t watch movies with me anymore because I vocally dissect the “tragic hero” in each film. I learned how to write a documentary essay and perfected the routine of a traditional essay. Now that we’re studying poets and poetic technique, I’ve developed such a deep attachment to certain poets that I’ve purchased collections and refused to lend them to my friends because I’m terrified to part with them.

Rereading this essay requires me to ask myself if I’m an English addict. Given the quality of English education I’ve received, I doubt this type of addiction is harmful. But I have decided to pursue an English career—related to editing and/or education. West De Pere’s teachers have given me challenges that have benefited my English skills and assignments that have reinforced Albert Einstein’s point that “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” I am deeply inspired by the instruction I’ve obtained at West De Pere.

My teachers instilled within me the knowledge that great literature goes beyond the classroom. I know that the various lessons I’ve learned from my English teachers and the writing they gave us . . . will carry with me through various stages of my life. . . . I want to be an English professor some day. My College Credit Honors English teacher, Mrs. Feldhausen, mentioned that I should think about that as a profession. She made me think about all the things we were learning and how much I enjoyed discussion groups and O’Neill. I e-mailed UW-Madison promptly and asked them to switch my major to English. Nothing would make me happier than to be like my crazy (wink) English teachers, and dedicate my life to English. —Carrie Lorig