A Wisconsin Resource for Visual Literacy and Visual Materials in the Language Arts Classroom
# New Title Here

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Submission Guidelines

Send two copies of each manuscript, typed and double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and references), with one-inch margins. OR Submit your manuscript electronically to the guest editor, JoAnne Katzmarek (jkatzmar@uwsp.edu); a Word attachment is preferred. Further questions may be directed to editor, Ruth Wood (Ruthann.P.Wood@uwrf.edu).

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

Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the Guidelines for NonSexist 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 provide a disk copy of the manuscript in Word.

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Call for Papers
Fall 2006 Issue:
Reading Comprehension Instruction in the
English Language Arts Classroom

Can reading comprehension instruction service the larger aesthetic goals of English language arts experiences at the same time it supports the need for reading skills development? How do English teachers help students develop strategies and skills for vocabulary acquisition? In what ways might English teachers teach literature and at the same time build reading comprehension skills?

Can such instruction facilitate not only the development in skills of reading but also growth in the student’s appreciation for the power of stories, poems, essays, and plays to change one’s life, to celebrate one’s life, to question one’s life?

We invite you to submit articles that explore these or related issues. We would especially like to see articles or ideas for actual classroom teaching.

Forward submissions and/or inquiries to:
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Electronic submissions are welcomed.
Deadline September 10, 2006

Letter

Hello WCTE members,

This is the last letter before the annual meeting in Wisconsin. A reasonable reason for this letter being late has been said, “The grass will be this good again.”

Our team, Vanessa, Dan, Mary, Libby, and I, appreciate your patience.

Kroll and Q2 are always available to answer questions. They answer how and what they can.

But the team is ready for you. We have fun and do not take the job they assigned us lightly. We are all happy.

Joan Back, Mary Call, and Michael Czep have been a help.
Kathie Tramont, the steam, has been great.

As you reach out to the department, you can see that we hope you will read this newsletter.

Ruth Wood

Annual Meeting

WCTE West Point Section

No longer includes...
Letter from the Editor

Hello WEJ readers:

This is the third time WEJ has devoted its spring issue to an “outstanding English/language arts department” from the state of Wisconsin. Volunteer copy-editor, David Wood, explaining his reasons for calling it the “best issue” we’ve published in a while, said, “The stories are so inspiring; it’s hard to believe a school can be this good.”

Our team of “reporters” for this issue—Professor of English Education, David Furniss, and English education senior majors Jovin Kroll and Sarah McRoberts—were also astonished by the powerful educational experience they observed at DeLong Middle School. They gave a lot of credit to Principal Dr. Deborah Hansen.

But the teachers at DeLong also deserve a rousing “Bravo!” for the job they are doing. Those who submitted articles for this edition—Joan Bachmeier, Rozanna Bejin (department chair), Derick Black, Michael Garrity, Donna Hitchens, Susan Huston, Mark Tafel, Kathie Trzecinski, Ken Walden, and Jayne Woodburn—are clearly the steam that drives the engine.

As you read their stories of what they do and how they do it, we hope you’ll be inspired as well—perhaps enough to nominate your department as a subject for next spring’s issue of WEJ. You can look me up at next fall’s convention in Madison.

Ruth Wood, Editor

Annual Convention Set for Madison, November 3

Popular Culture in the English Class is the theme of the 2006 WCTELA state convention, to be held at the Marriott Madison West Friday, November 3. WCTELA is seeking proposals for sectional presentations about all aspects of English teaching, including those that address the convention theme. For more information consult the WCTELA website at: http://facstaff.uww.edu/wctela/
DeLong Middle School Has That Vision Thing
by David Furniss

A few years ago, results on standardized tests showed DeLong Middle School’s students to be lagging in the language arts. The school had adopted an innovative, student-centered curriculum in the 1990s, when it was converted from a junior high school to the first middle school in Eau Claire. The thirty-seven new teachers hired in the transition prepared to work in a school that emphasized a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach, whose mission embraced the importance of students’ social and affective development. Sixth graders, making the transition from elementary school, were placed in one of three teams, each team led by four teachers who worked closely together, all four teaching social studies, but dividing the language arts and math/science equally. The 6th grade teachers soon wrote a grant to support the Moon BEAMS project, which takes students out of school and puts them on or beside Half Moon Lake for more than six weeks each fall. The 7th and 8th grade language arts program adopted Atwell’s workshop model, balancing three weeks of more traditional units with three weeks of independent writing and writing.

So how did the school’s leadership respond to the low test scores? We know what often happens: more time devoted to preparing for the tests, less space in the curriculum for projects and activities that don’t match the sort of reading and writing tasks students encounter on standardized tests. At the very least, one might expect that 6th grade teachers would have to spend a great deal of time and energy justifying those weeks at Half Moon Lake, and 7th and 8th grade teachers would be asked to explain why their students are allowed to spend so much of their time reading and writing what they want to.

But as you’ll learn from the pieces in this issue of WEJ, such moves weren’t made at DeLong. If anything, those troublesome test scores brought about more innovation. The administration and language frustration, released, released, released, and promote voluntary support for innovations has this requires every important. Everyone now has a project that is more than thirty percent of the auditorium work, including writing as a focal point. All students have a grade to improve.

I visited the school last winter for a session majoring in English and the enthusiastic version of Shakespeare.
I asked to speak to the class Huston, a small group of students I think of as freedom fighters, according to Ken W. Black, an English teacher who told me that they are the ShakespeareQUEST type students in this festival. Reading/English shelves are piled high with fun and adventure. Ken Black, who has experience with risky-source learning.

I had read that there were before I visited the school the teachers in believing that over but I was pleased about the
language arts department decided to designate a Writing Coordinator, releasing a language arts teacher from one class in order to promote writing in and out of the classroom. Derick Black, who has this responsibility at present, told me his charge was to “make sure everyone in the building is involved in writing.” DeLong now has a short story contest, a film script competition with more than thirty entrants, and regular poetry readings that nearly fill the auditorium (on a Friday afternoon). Gifted/talented students act as writing mentors. The Reading/Writing Workshop continues to be a focal point of the language arts program. Enough 8th-grade students have been working steadily on a piece of writing since 7th grade to raise the possibility of a novel-writing contest.

I visited DeLong in March in the company of two English Education majors from UW-River Falls. All that day I listened to enthusiastic voices telling me of the joys of working at DeLong. When I asked two 6th grade block teachers, Joan Bachmeier and Susan Huston, about the challenges they face in preparing a diverse group of kids for the transition to the upper grades, they couldn’t think of any significant problems. Instead, they spoke of the support they receive from their fellow teachers and of the amount of freedom the teams have in structuring their curriculum. I talked to Ken Walden, a 7th grade teacher beginning his Hamlet unit, who told me how much the students love Shakespeare and how they are looking forward to taking their turn on stage in this year’s Shakespeare Festival. I met Rozie Bejin, one of the founders of this festival and a twenty-five-year veteran teacher who piloted the Reading/Writing Workshop. We talked in her classroom, where shelves are filled with the books for her young readers purchased with funds she obtained through a grant. And I visited with Derick Black, who praised the school’s administration for its “can do” attitude, its willingness to let teachers try out their ideas—even the risky-sounding ones like Friday afternoon poetry readings.

I had read some of the pieces DeLong’s teachers submitted to WEJ before I came to the school, so I was prepared to be impressed by the teaching staff. But I would say that the most impressive meeting that day was with DeLong’s principal, Deborah Hansen, who has been at the school for twenty-eight years. I learned from her about the school’s history, especially of the transition from a junior
high to a middle school program fifteen years ago. Dr. Hansen well remembers the junior high as a “tough school,” in which the predominant learning model was lecture-review-test, taking place “behind closed doors.”

While the school now has more balance with respect to class and ethnicity than it did twenty years ago, it is the most diverse of Eau Claire’s three middle schools, with 40% of the students receiving free or reduced-cost lunch, and with more ELL students enrolled than at the other schools. She said that DeLong’s students still score lower on standardized tests, on average, than those at the

other Eau Claire middle schools, but DeLong’s performance is on par with the state average. This is good enough. Dr. Hansen considers it a “knee-jerk reaction” to abandon innovation in the face of standardized accountability measures.

Rather, she remains committed to the vision that she and her colleagues had for DeLong from the first. That vision emphasizes the school’s vital role in helping students rise out of poverty by providing them with varied learning experiences that promote literacy—the sort of experiences described in this issue. The school is also dedicated to finding the resources to help expand the students’ cultural horizons. Besides, DeLong will continue to be more than a “month-long” end of the year project. Rather, the students are building a quilt square that fills the assembly hall and will be given to former students.

Toward the end of November, Susan Hruska and her colleagues in the BEAMS program began teaching the kids about the BEAMS program. What began as a 10-week program has been extended for another 10 weeks, and Hruska said that she hopes to have a garden full of flowers by the end of the school year.
cultural horizons, which last year resulted in DeLong’s receiving more than $25,000 in grants. DeLong’s mission is to be actively involved in its community, requiring community-based projects of all students. One example is the annual Veterans Day Project, an important tradition. Seventh graders in different subject areas make quilt squares depicting the lives and experiences of area veterans. The assembled quilt is presented on Veterans Day at a celebration that fills the auditorium.

Toward the end of our discussion, Dr. Hansen observed that DeLong is a “collective program, a collective culture” that doesn’t depend for success on one person. For this to happen, teachers must be given the chance to experiment, collaborate meaningfully with colleagues, and develop professional confidence. I saw clear evidence of this culture at work in my first meeting of the day, when Susan Huston and Joan Bachmeier described the current Moon BEAMS project, which has expanded on the innovative program begun ten years ago by their retired colleague, Mark Veneziano. And I continued to see it in my discussions with DeLong language arts teachers. I was gratified that the two prospective teachers I brought with me got a chance to see some of the best principles and practices described in their texts and methods classes in such full flower at DeLong Middle School.
Every School Needs a Dr. Deb Hansen
by Sarah McRoberts

When I was in middle school, visiting the principal’s office was never a pleasant experience. Twelve years later, however, visiting DeLong Middle School’s principal, Dr. Deb Hansen, was a truly enjoyable experience. Her belief that “DeLong is a working family” touches all that she does and promotes the success that DeLong Middle School has had.

DeLong is not an average middle school, especially in Eau Claire. According to Dr. Hansen, the school accepts the most severe ELL and special education students, and over 40% of its students are on free or reduced lunch. This wide variety obviously affects standardized test scores. But rather than worry about scores that are unattainable for DeLong, Dr. Hansen is realistic. She explained that Delong “will always have lower scores, so we compare our scores to ourselves and the state,” not other schools in the district.

With a dominant goal of “literacy for all,” Dr. Hansen maintains a strong level of mentorship in the school. Currently, the school has multiple programs available to help students of varying academic levels. SBC (telephone company) provides one-on-one mentoring by getting local business owners to “adopt” an at-risk student. Owners who participate on behalf of SBC meet with their student once a week to serve as an adult with an active interest in their life.

For gifted and talented students, DeLong has a mentorship program connected to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. English majors tutor middle school students [see article in this issue by Donna Hitchens] who are recommended as excellent writers. During the semester, Eau Claire students work with their tutees on stories, poems, and other works. At the end of the semester, parents are invited to a presentation where their child reads one of the writings they worked on with their tutor.

Teachers are part of the school setting, “together.” They teach students leadership roles. They share success as a whole. They create that respect and, more fun, energy around it: “My job is to be in academic from innovation and creative, programs like to bring celebrity School.

When these come together, philosophy, a multi-disciplinary unit, shows development. It showed an excellent adult,

After this interview, the principal’s office had been my place to the right director, of her to go a...
The cohesiveness of such a diverse student body, Dr. Hansen says, depends on adhering to a strict value system of mutual respect, regardless of race, rank, or social class. With her strong social work and counseling background, Dr. Hansen knows how important it is for students to feel secure and respected in the school environment. If the students respect the school, they will respect each other. Even when students leave the school premises, they are reminded to positively represent their school—everywhere from attending plays in the community to going on trips to Valley Fair or the Dells.

Teachers are part of the mutual respect policy as well. In a middle school setting, Dr. Hansen believes that everyone is “all in it together.” Therefore, she tries very hard to find the right fit for teachers when it comes to their placement within the school and leadership roles. Also, she believes that everyone should celebrate success as a whole rather than as an individual achievement, so that respect and pride will grow, and staff and students will have more fun, energy, and time to do their job. As Dr. Hansen explains it: “My job is to encourage, then get out of the way.” She believes in academic freedom for teachers and an open-door policy for innovation and creativity. She wants teachers to develop new ideas, write grants, and explore what they can do to trigger curiosity and inspire reading. Through her inspiration, teachers have created programs like Moon BEAMS and won grant money which has brought celebrity readers, like Chris Crutcher, to DeLong Middle School.

When these components meld together to form Dr. Hansen’s philosophy, a middle school emerges that has collaboration, interdisciplinary units, and a focus on a child’s social and educational development. From DeLong’s successes, it is clear that Hansen is an excellent administrator guiding the school towards the future.

After this interview, I wonder how much I would have avoided the principal’s office during my middle school years if Deb Hansen had been my principal. DeLong Middle School is truly headed in the right direction with a great captain; I just wish there were more of her to go around.
There's Only One Thing Pedestrian about DeLong Middle School
by Jovin Kroll

It took me all of about two minutes to realize that DeLong Middle School in Eau Claire is truly a special place to go to school. Arriving thirty-five minutes before the first bell of the seven-period day, I, along with Dr. David Furniss and Sarah McRoberts, who is also a pre-professional teacher, headed to the Interactive Media Center to plan out our day. I was astounded to find the computer lab adjacent to the media center full of students. The sight of middle schoolers clacking away on their computers twenty minutes before most schools even allow kids in the doors strongly indicated to me that Delong is a school where the kids actually do come first.

This feeling was solidified throughout the day. After leaving the spacious IMC, passing by numerous history projects on display in the hallway, I was thrown into an exciting seventh-grade Shakespeare class. Seventh graders are the youngest that I've seen being taught Shakespeare, and the kids were really into it—even at eight in the morning.

After I left Mr. Walden's English class, I found Sarah, and the two of us had the pleasure of meeting a sixth-grade student named Grant. In his interdisciplinary class that combines English and science, Grant put together a poem booklet that contains about fifteen selections of his own poetry. The poetry focused on a variety of the nature themes that the students had been looking at for the science section of the class. Every student in the classroom participated in the poetry project, and Grant went above and beyond his own expectations entering the unit. "I wasn't really interested in poetry before the unit," said Grant, who later added that he might now be interested in writing more poetry in the future.

Grant's poems ranged from three-line haikus—his favorite was

about bees—themselves for the most part. A particular style that he turned to help one another.

When asked about his next up, Grant said, "He also said

After Grant presented his work of the next up, and his poem of his classroom, I was astounded for each grade.

The two of us were in complete agreement with the principal: the students in the school are great.
about bees—to a poem that was two pages long. To prepare themselves for their writing, students read poems written in the particular style they were studying. They then used peer advising, to help one another complete their particular poems in that style. When asked if everyone should experience this poetry project, Grant said, “Yes, it helps you with writing and good word choice.” He also said that he learned a lot about syllables from this project. After Grant proudly showed me his travel brochure on Nepal, part of the next unit he was working on, we sent him off to join the rest of his classmates in one of the school’s computer labs (there’s a lab for each grade level plus the computers in the IMC).

The two of us then hooked up with Dr. Furniss for an interview with the principal, Dr. Deb Hansen. Sarah has written a separate article about our meeting with Dr. Hansen, but I must add my own great amazement to learn from Dr. Hansen about the number of affiliations the school has with outside businesses for the benefit of its students. From DeLong’s work with SBC (a local telephone company) to bring in older citizens for mentoring, to its affiliation with the DNR in its Lake Project and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for mentoring, the kids benefit from the efforts of both educators and community members. On the day that we were visiting, even Jessica Doyle, the first lady of Wisconsin, happened to be making a stop at the school. The three of us from UW-River Falls left our meeting with Dr. Hansen more than impressed about the school as a whole.
After lunch, I finished out my day at DeLong with Ms. Rozanna Bejin, an eighth-grade English teacher in her twenty-seventh year of teaching. In her classroom, I witnessed much of the same enthusiasm that I had seen earlier in Mr. Walden’s class. What struck me as an important lesson that I can take from her is that she does not feel it necessary to analyze a book till it’s sawdust. On this day, the students were beginning *Acceleration*, a mystery novel by Graham McNamee. After going through the setting, characters, and vocabulary words from the novel, Ms. Bejin more or less set the kids free to read the book on their own during the next few days of class, a reward at the end of a long quarter of work. Some books are simply to be enjoyed.

Prior to class, Ms. Bejin discussed a variety of topics with the three of us, two that I really liked as possibilities for my future classroom. The first idea was splitting the grade book into sections for Reading, Writing, and Discussion, in order to weight the final grade towards the section that the student is best at. Students can thus receive accolades for their best accomplishments, rather than losing sight of them when they’re averaged in with their weaker learning areas. I also like that Mrs. Bejin allows eighth graders to choose a lot of their own books for class reading workshops. I certainly agree with her that the students are starting to become more adult-like, and they will have more success in the classroom with novels that they are able to personally respond to.

As the three of us walked out of DeLong Middle School, I rehashed what I had experienced during the day. I had witnessed a school that gave its students a lot of meaningful work. Every project students were working on required that they put a piece of themselves into it. I think the individuality in the work that I saw was one of the main reasons that the students seemed so dedicated to completing whatever it was they were working on. Throughout the day I had not witnessed one disciplinary problem, and I believe the touch of individuality and the real-world application in these students’ work were two of the main reasons for that. One of these applications was apparent as we turned onto Clairemont Avenue and saw the pedestrian tunnel that past DeLong students had worked so hard to get the city to build.

Visiting DeLong

Staring at the outside of the school, I thinking how much I have visited. However, we walked through the hallways just fallen into a routine.

As our visiting group (Vladenov, Center), we were given a tour of student and teacher spaces, including birds, and tennis gyms. Observation are essential to learning. Huge bookcases with learning materials cover the walls between teachers sitting to their content.

Like the hallways, suspended from the ceiling, the attitude of bookshelves
Visiting Wonderland:
DeLong Middle School
by Sarah McRoberts

Staring at the outside of DeLong Middle School, I could not help thinking how much the building looked like other middle schools I have visited. However, all preconceived stereotypes left me as I walked through the front doors and felt, like Alice, as though I had just fallen into a magical world of possibility.

As our visiting group headed toward the IMC (Interactive Media Center), we were greeted by hallways that showcased a variety of student and teacher talents. Vibrant paintings of color wheels, birds, and tennis shoes announced the fact that creativity and innovation are essential cornerstones to DeLong’s philosophy of learning. Huge bookcases outside of teacher’s rooms were filled with learning materials relating to nature, reading, and historical figures; walls between teachers’ rooms displayed murals and posters relating to their content area or current curricular topics.

Like the hallways, the IMC was a sight to behold! A huge dragon suspended from the ceiling and a large floor area housing a multitude of bookshelves and inviting round tables created a welcoming
learning environment. One special area highlighted books of special interest like historical fiction, adventure, and mystery. Another smaller area displayed students’ award-winning history posters.

Aside from promoting solid academics, the IMC sponsors numerous activities. On certain mornings, the IMC staff hosts academic games for students who arrive at school early. Outside of school hours, the community also becomes involved in the school through trivia games offering several awards.

Pulling myself away from the school, where I encountered a variety of activities, is part of a project I’m researching. This school year, I have learned about the traditions of the quilt together as one of the ways to receive the quilt at the end of the school year.

The next bell signaled that I had entered the faculty lounge, a place where camaraderie. Rather than scrunched into uncomfortable chairs, everyone scrunches into comfortable and comfortable and comfortable chairs.

For the last hour of class, I was discussing his role in the development of screenplays, I understood that beyond the limit at Delong.

At the end of the day, the perception of the event was something but typical to the school, which was exceptional that very year.
to an indoor aviary. I was astounded! Inside an elaborate cage, several finches native to Wisconsin greeted me with a lovely tune. Dr. Deb Hansen, the principal, later explained that the indoor aviary and aquarium help connect students to nature. Several teachers had come up with the idea of bringing nature to the students when they realized that many students were unfamiliar with the native wildlife of Wisconsin.

Pulling myself away from the finches, I moved to the second floor, where I encountered a beautiful quilt hanging on a wall. The quilt is part of a project inspired by veterans. Each student has to research a veteran and create a quilt block representing something they learned about that person. Next, community volunteers sew the quilt together. Finally, as a class, students must decide who will receive the quilt as part of a patriotic presentation.

The next bell signaled lunch. I was delighted once again when I entered the faculty lounge and observed the wonderful staff camaraderie. Rather than being spread out over several tables, everyone crunched around one big table. People talked, joked, and ate together as one. As a future teacher, I liked seeing a group so comfortable and close with each other.

For the last hour of my visit, I spent time with Mr. Derick Black discussing his role as a Writing Coordinator. The position was created out of a desire to raise test scores and encourage students to write. Outside his door, a sheet of paper announced a poetry reading. Mr. Black mentioned that he had posted the sign-up sheet in the morning, and after lunch the entire sheet was nearly filled—with about an equal mixture of boys and girls. I was astounded! When he told me that other students were working on screenplays, I understood the reason why many say that the sky is the limit at DeLong Middle School. As Mr. Black stated, “Everyone has an opportunity to be a writer in some way.”

At the end of the day, I could not believe how wrong my initial perception of the school was. DeLong Middle School seems anything but typical to this soon-to-be English teacher. In fact, it is so exceptional that visiting here was truly like visiting Wonderland.
Time, Ownership, Response:
The 7th Grade Workshop Model
by Kathie Trzecinski

Nancy Atwell’s model of Reader/Writer Workshop is based on three key principles: Time, Ownership and Response. That is the glue that holds the 7th and 8th grade English Curriculum together at DeLong Middle School. Fifty percent of our curriculum is devoted to the Reader Writer Workshop. Sometimes I find it amazing that we spend one half of our school year on Reader/Writer Workshop; on the other hand, when I consider what would be the alternative, I really don’t know any better way to teach middle school children about reading and writing.

I have found that children really love to choose their own reading materials and writing topics—especially those who have been readers and writers for a long time. When students who have been always told what to read and what to write about become perplexed because they are now forced to find out what they like, I explain that this is not only their opportunity but their responsibility to choose what they find meaningful.

I like to start the school year off with Reader Workshop. I tell the students my only requirement is that they have to spend their time reading a book they love. If they are not loving the book, it won’t work for Reader Workshop.

Time is crucial in Workshop. We can’t expect DeLong students to do the majority of the reading on their own time outside of class, so if reading is important, it should be done IN class. Given class time to read ensures that students will quickly discover whether they do care about the characters and care about what is happening to them.

Once students are about 50 to 70 pages into a book, the book most likely will have them hooked. At this stage Reader Workshop is very exciting to me and motivating to the students. Students will often come to class and say, “Do we GET to read today?” I love that point where they don’t want to stop reading than that.

However, having students make a connection is not what Nancy Atwell means by important aspect is making a connection to politics from their books. In school students often it extremely difficult it is where mini-lessons are most needed. I share something,” I share makes a good response. I share characters and what stories, connections, quoted passages that made them feel, made them think, that relate not only to the story.

The most common feeling too much summarizing in their writing that is missing is “and then this happened and made them feel sad,” “I believe that journaling, accomplishment in class, they personally founds to it.

After a session of Reader Workshop, students will lead the group into Writer Workshop. This is how the Workshop will lead the students to become more creative. They must get the person/character in the
where they don’t want to part with their books. There is no better reading than that.

However, having students just reading and enjoying their reading is not what Nancy Atwell’s model is all about. I feel that the most important aspect is “response.” Students must share and use specifics from their books to explain WHY they love their story. Middle school students often know when they like something, but they find it extremely difficult to explain why and to pinpoint specifics. This is where mini-lessons are beneficial. In addition, I read along with the students, and when I come to something that makes me “feel something,” I share it with them. I also share with them a list of what makes a good response: some summary, their emotions about the characters and what is happening to them, recollections of similar stories, connections to something that really happened to them, and quoted passages that moved them emotionally. As the year progresses, through mini-lessons, I introduce them to literary terms that may relate not only to the author’s style, but also to the total effect of the story.

The most common form of response is journal writing. To avoid getting too much summary, I ask the students to highlight everything in their writing that is NOT summary. If more than half of their writing is “and then this happened.....,” I tell them to check the Response Rubric and go back to their book to pull out specifics about what parts made them feel sad, angry, silly, happy, anxious, or another emotion. I believe that journal responses do indeed give the students a sense of accomplishment in completing a book and being able to analyze why they personally found this story worth their time to read.

After a session of Reader Workshop, I like to move the students right into Writer Workshop. Often the mini-lessons on literature in Reader Workshop will lead the students into “what makes good writing” in Writer Workshop. I tell the students that, since they like to read something that makes them “feel and/or care” about the characters, the goal in their own writing is to allow their reader to do the same. Whether they are creating a fictional story or writing a personal narrative, they must get their reader to care about what is happening to the person/character in the writing.
Writer Workshop follows the same philosophy as Reader Workshop—Time, Ownership and Response. Students need to find what is important to them to write about. I have found that mini-lessons, especially Nancy Atwell’s lesson on “Writing Territories” are very helpful. Atwell’s article opens a whole world of topics for students to consider. She shows them that writing doesn’t always have to be about the BIG things that happen. Writing about the small, everyday dealings of our sometime mundane lives can make very intriguing writing pieces.

Time. Students need time to write in class, time to confer in class, time to revise in class, time to edit in class and time to publish in class. Throughout the Writer Workshop session, there is on-going time for teacher response. I might be just standing over a student’s shoulder peeking in on his/her writing and ask the student for a clarification about the writing, or I may have the students look for a particular writing technique that I have explained in a mini-lesson on their own writing. Students also seek response from other students. However, I feel one of the best forms of response comes from parents. I offer extra credit to students who share their papers with a parent and ask that parent for feedback.

Publishing is a part of writer workshop that takes a lot of time, but I wouldn’t do away with it. I tell the students, no one writes something only to hand it over to a teacher who puts a grade on it and that is the end of it. No, writers write to publish. The variety of ways we publish ranges from oral presentations in a large group or small groups, publishing with another teacher, sending the writing to the in-school paper, and sending the writing to a publisher outside the school building. I have found the *High School Writer/Junior High Edition* to be an excellent publication for publishing student work. After publishing, students feel a strong sense of accomplishment and are proud of what they have produced. Proud enough to ask, “When can we do this again?”

In my 21 years of teaching, I have found many program models out there about how to teach reading and writing, but I have found none that is as pure and simple as Nancy Atwell’s. Her model is based on sitting next to student and asking, “Tell me about what you are reading? Tell me about what you are writing?” The dialogue that follows between teacher and student from those questions is the real essence of what teaching and learning is all about.

A SONG

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A Slam Dunk,
But Not a Slam
by Derick Black

I'm a closet poet. Let's face it, many of us are. I love to write and try to put my world into words that capture something more. My world, the way I see it, for me. The good, the bad, the unrhymed. Like most closet poets, my poetry doesn't get shared with the masses and I prefer it that way. I guess in growing older I have also grown shy, embarrassed, and self-conscious of my creative doings. The thought of me reading my poetry scares the Shel Silverstein out of me. However, there are those who embrace the stage and live for the opportunity to share what they've written. It was this realization that started me down a path of student poetry readings.

As a teacher I ask my kids to do what I dread. I ask them to expose their inner poet. But it doesn't stop there. I ask them to share. Some students embrace this opportunity to reveal their hearts and souls out in front of their peers while others awkwardly take the center of the room and hide behind their iambic pentameter. One by one they grace our poetry stage with a free verse, haiku, or sonnet that they wrote the day before in workshop. I tell the kids we don't expect greatness, just a little honesty and courage. Some days we run the gamut of good and bad, but some days are magical where the kids truly open up and find the poem that is hidden inside their middle school hearts. Regardless of what kind of in-class reading we have had, most kids hurry out to avoid any post-reading conference with me. There are, however, those few kids who always seem to stick around to ramble on about the in-class reading and to keep the adrenaline high for a few moments longer.

"That was awesome! I mean I actually felt like I was on stage."
"My knees were shaking I was so scared and happy at the same time."
"Do you think he noticed the poem was about him?"
After seeing the same results from each of my classes it was obvious to me that these kids needed more. I also realized that there were probably more kids like them out there wandering the halls. Who were these poets and did they want a stage to read from as well? There was only one way to find out. I organized the first DeLong Middle School Poetry Reading.

The idea itself is rather simple: create a situation that gives students an opportunity to read what they have written. “By students for students,” was the motto I was going to live by. My job would be to make sure the microphones were on. I was not going to censor or preview the poetry. The students were told to keep it appropriate for school and I went on good faith that they would.

We had the space available, so it seemed simple to organize. I would run a school-wide reading just like my in-class reading with minor adjustments. This would be a poetry slam with a rowdy atmosphere, but an event that put the poet at the center. Good or bad, the poet owned the stage for the few moments they had.

After a night of brainstorming and talking with our English chairperson, posters advertising the event went up. Announcements were made. The date was set. Sign-up sheets were hung outside my classroom:

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**It’s poetry time at DeLong Middle School!**

On Friday, November 18th, we will be hosting a school-wide poetry reading. We encourage you and your students to perform original poetry.

Poets need to sign-up outside of Mr. Black’s room (208A) during the week of November 14-18. Each poet will have two minutes or a two-poem limit.

Remember, showcased poems need to be original work and appropriate for school!

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All I had to do was organize and promote. The day of the reading, I placed two sign-up sheets on the bulletin board in bold print. Each student had to sign up in order to be absent.

The response was overwhelming; they brought their poetry with them. I had expected some of them to show up, but I didn’t want to make it a mandatory assignment. I was just happy that so many of our auditorium seats were filled.

Our auditorium was dimly lit, which I had hoped to create any mood I wanted. As the audience was seated, the seriousness to the occasion crept in. I realized there was no way this made it all the way to the back seat. The dim lighting blinded the reader’s eyes, and I discussed with them the importance of eye contact with their listeners. With two students on each side of a table, we had ample light to read.
All I had to do was wait and see. I didn’t wait long. By the next day, word had spread like wildfire and the list was filling up fast. After the 20 slots I had on my sign-up sheet were filled, some student added his own sheet of paper under mine and put his name in bold print. Fortunately, he got to read that day due to a student being absent.

The response was more than I expected. Teachers signed up to read their poetry with the students. Other teachers left me messages that they didn’t want to read, but they wanted to bring their students down to watch the event. On Friday afternoon, the floor seating of our auditorium was packed. Who knew that the halls we walk every day were overflowing with poets?

Our auditorium has a light and sound system that allows us to create any mood that one can dream up. So, I figured a darkened auditorium with a focused spotlight would create the mood of seriousness to help the poet and audience. We soon found out that this made it almost impossible to read on stage, as the direct spot blinded the reader. So, we settled on a warmer, dimly lit setting with closed curtain; side spots casting long shadows gave the poet ample light to read by.
I was shocked to see how well the student audience responded to this situation. An assembly can be a rather loud event that is non-conducive to a poetry reading. However, after a short welcome and explanation of expectations, the student body sat motionless and silent for the duration of the reading. We told the audience at the beginning of the reading that they would like some of the poems and not like some of the poems they were about to hear. By putting this up front, the audience realized that this was serious and in the end, applauded appropriately for each poet.

Following the reading, I had the chance to speak with many of the poets and the non-poets. The response was wonderful. Collectively they wanted more. Two times a month. Three times a month. Every Friday. I could see that there was definitely a need. But I began to wonder about the other writers out there.

What about the essayist? What about the short story writer? The answer seemed obvious. Using the same format as the poetry reading, we had a scary story reading that coincided with Halloween. This was as successful as the poetry readings. The writers were coming out of the woodwork and there was no end in sight.

By March the readings were common. Some readings were themed readings (rhyming love poetry for Valentines Day) while others were just open readings. There were the regulars (a pair of boys who called themselves The Troubled Trio) and we had our one-hit wonders that would read once and then never be seen again. Regardless of who signed up to read, we always filled the time and often had to turn kids away.

Poetry is alive and well at DeLong Middle School. I don’t feel responsible for that fact in any way. However, I do feel that I have created a stage for these voices to be heard. It amazes me that in just under a half hour we get to hear students speak poetically about the death of a loved one, getting a puppy, their first kiss, being dumped, sleeping at a friend’s house, and all the other things that a middle school poet knows. At some point the poetry transcends words and becomes something more. Sometime after the bell rings and before the buses come, the poet turns words and rhythm into life. It is an experience not to be missed.
Building a Fire Within: Writing Mentorships
by Donna Hitchens

You get the best effort from others not by lighting a fire beneath them, but by building a fire within.

-Bob Nelson

Gifted and Talented English/Language Arts students at DeLong Middle School have many opportunities available to further develop their talents. Some students’ needs are best met through grade acceleration in English while other students participate in Junior Great Books, advanced novel groups, Shakespeare Festival, and philosophy groups at their own grade level. Many talented English students enjoy the extra curriculars of forensics or the school play. But a very powerful program for “lighting the fire within” our talented writers is the middle school writing mentorship partnership created between the Eau Claire Area School District (ECASD) and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC).

At the beginning of each semester, the Gifted and Talented Coordinator of the ECASD, Susan Savolainen, arranges a meeting with university education students who have a major or minor in English to plan an opportunity to be a writing mentor at one of the three middle schools in Eau Claire. University English education professors encourage student participation and sometimes include a mentoring experience as part of their course requirements. The interested university students receive a writing mentorship handbook and an application form where the university students indicate times during the day when they would be available to meet with middle school students. The applications from the university
students are sent within the next week to the district coordinator, who then divides the mentors among the three middle schools.

Meanwhile, in each building, the gifted and talented resource teacher gathers names of talented student writers from their English teachers and matches them to a writing mentor. Middle school students selected to have a mentor fill out a form identifying one or two goals they would like to accomplish during the mentorship and also agree to complete a piece of writing during the mentorship to present at an evening presentation for parents, other students, and teachers at the university.

Before the mentorship begins, each university mentor assigned to DeLong Middle School visits the school for an orientation to the building. The mentors, sophomores or juniors at UWEC who are just beginning their education classes, have usually not worked with middle school students prior to the mentorship. They arrive at DeLong with many questions for the resource teacher and some anxiety about working with middle school students. They observe noisy hall passing times and peek into busy classrooms with looks of apprehension on their faces that seem to say, “What have I gotten myself into?” With encouragement and assurance from the resource teacher, the mentors receive their schedule and assigned room, talk about expectations, receive student goal sheets, and ask any questions they have about the mentorship program or the students they are assigned.

Mentors are usually assigned two to four students for the six-to-eight-week mentorships. Also, before they leave the building, they sign a mentorship agreement that delineates the responsibilities of a mentor. Responsibilities listed in the agreement include specifying arrival times, bringing any concerns to the attention of the resource teacher, giving feedback to students, completing evaluations, and demonstrating current, best practices in the teaching of English/Language Arts as taught by instructors at UWEC.

Parents of middle school students receive a letter before the mentorship begins explaining that their child has been selected to participate in a writing mentorship with a university student. The letter emphasizes that their child’s classroom teacher is supportive of the mentorship and the existing curriculum for the six-to-eight-week period. Parents are required to sign the letter indicating they will perform writing tasks at home with their child as a final piece to be shared at the conclusion of the mentorship at the university. By sharing the mentorship letter, parents are able to mark their final piece as a priority for the mentor.

For the university mentor, the first week at the building, they attend the six-to-eight-week writing-to-know-your-mentor orientation week. At that time, they are assigned a mentor by the resource teacher at DeLong Middle School. This allows the mentors to spend time with students to produce the first of the six-to-eight-week goal of reading.

Students are given a folder that includes writing that is processed over the first week. They fold it up into a folder and bring it home to read and discuss with their mentor. This is the beginning of the six-to-eight-week mentorship, which stays in touch with students and mentors, sometimes during mentoring sessions, and four times a year. Mentors and students stay in touch, meeting face-to-face multiple times during the six-to-eight-week period. These are responses to the mentorship formal goals:

I think that I enjoyed helping mentor the students at DeLong the most. Each week, I brought them ideas to work on and mentored them in writing. I taught them to think about what they were writing down every single day. And then I helped them write down what people would
the mentorship and will make appropriate accommodations within the existing curriculum for the student to miss one class period per week. Parents are informed that during the mentor time students will perform writing exercises, complete peer editing, and create a final piece to be shared with others at the evening of reading at the university. By sharing the date for the reading in this letter, parents are able to mark calendars weeks in advance and the evening becomes a priority for parents and sometimes even grandparents!

For the university mentors, once they have had their orientation to the building, they return to their classes where they design a getting-to-know-you lesson for the first mentoring session the following week. At that first writing session, students are introduced to the mentor by the gifted and talented resource teacher at DeLong Middle School. The resource teacher explains the expectations of students to produce a finished piece of writing to share at the evening of reading.

Students are given a folder where they store their goals and all writing that is produced during the mentorship. Mentors keep the folder and bring it to each mentoring session. Throughout the six-to-eight-week session mentors design lessons around the students’ goals. Sometimes students e-mail work to their mentor between weekly meetings to get additional feedback. The resource teacher stays in touch with the mentor through e-mails or short visits to the mentoring session. Already by the second session with the students, mentors are wondering what they ever had to worry about. These are responses to an e-mail asking about how things were going:

I think that the thing that surprised me most was that I brought them journals to use as writer’s notebooks to help them gather ideas, and they loved them. They are writing down exciting things that they have noticed during the day. And that’s part of being a writer--noticing things other people would just walk right by.

S., mentor
For their first homework assignment I asked them to write 3 or 4 sentences on a topic of their choice. When they brought it back, each one had written at least a page and one of them wrote two pages. This Wednesday we had a free-write about dreams. One of the girls wrote a beautiful poem. It was above and beyond what I was expecting for the topic.

S., mentor

The kids have continued to shock me with the writing they come up with on the spot. For myself, I think the biggest positive I have had thus far is that I have been able to create lessons that the students are excited about. This experience is giving me the opportunity to see what the students like and what works with them.

J., mentor

By the last two sessions, the pressure is on to finalize a piece of writing, practice the presentation, and complete evaluations.

Students and mentors are assigned to one of three rooms at the Davies Center at UWEC. Each room has students from all three middle schools. As families arrive with their sons and daughters dressed up for the evening as they would for a performance at a concert, they receive a program listing the rooms, mentors, and names of all the students who will be reading. Parents often arrive with cameras in hand, eager to meet the mentor they have heard so much about.

Presentations begin with a resource teacher from one of the middle schools welcoming everyone to an evening celebrating young writers. University mentors are introduced one at a time, and they do a brief introduction for each of their young writers. When the applause for the writers comes to an end after all pieces of writing have been shared, mentors are again called to the front of the audience by the resource teachers from each middle school to receive certificates for their participation in a writing mentorship and their own round of applause from the appreciative young writers and family members. Every piece of writing is passed out in a lobby where mentors and students can talk conversation and celebrate.

Even though the meeting of the many young writers at the end of each quarter is always special, I love writing and would love to see each of them improve. It is a fine program and I try even harder each quarter to help every single person be successful.

I love writing. I never thought I would, but now I love it. I try even harder to help each student improve. I love writing things that are not as hard as I thought they would be. I think this is a fun program and I try even harder each quarter to help every single person be successful.

They are young children who do not have the background they need to be successful. They don’t have the background they need to be successful.

It was a wonderful evening. It was not only wonderful, but it was also very exciting. I love writing things that are not as hard as I thought they would be. I think this is a fun program and I try even harder each quarter to help every single person be successful.

The students are young children who do not have the background they need to be successful. They don’t have the background they need to be successful.

While there are many programs throughout the country designed to help young children improve their writing, this program has enjoyed a very successful partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire that has helped many students improve their writing and passion for writing and
family members. Everyone is then invited to a reception in the lobby where mentors, young writers, teachers, and family share conversation and celebration over young writers’ accomplishments.

Even though the mentorship has ended with the evening celebrating young writers at UWEC, resource teachers still need to make copies of evaluations and student reflections to give to classroom teachers and to mail to parents. Through these reflections and evaluations by both mentors and students the sparks of enthusiasm for this program are evident. This is what they have said:

I love writing and I think that having a writing mentor helps me improve in areas I don’t even realize I need to improve. I try even harder to improve with my mentor.

A., student

They are your teachers, but they are really your friend, and they give you more one on one time than other teachers. They don’t have to worry about anyone else but you.

A., student

It was a wonderful experience. I liked that the kids were willing to try hard and do all the activities that were presented. I loved working with my group and reading all the beautiful pieces they produced.

L., mentor

The students were wonderful and it [mentoring] taught me a lot about what needs to be prepared and what challenges are to be faced. The students -- I think I got the best four there were.

S., mentor

While there are many opportunities at DeLong Middle School for talented English/Language Arts students, the writing mentorship program, which has evolved over the past ten years, has been a very successful partnership with UWEC in nurturing a student’s passion for writing and lighting the fire within.
Operation Hollywood:
From Page to Screen
by Karen Bejin

This unit was the brainstorm of my niece, then a staff writer and later editor of the USC Daily Trojan film reviews, and me, a middle school English teacher, as we chatted our way through an hour of exercise. Melissa was home on holiday from California and filling me in on her experiences that included seeing movies before they were released, sometimes being part of discussions led by the directors of the films, and occasionally attending junkets where she got to interview the actors of the film for her articles. The enthusiasm in her voice as she described her responsibilities and opportunities started a conversation that lasted much longer than the movement of the treadmill; and by the next week our plan was in place and she came to my classroom to help kick off the new unit that would hopefully bring enthusiasm to my students and the students on our entire team.

As Melissa introduced herself and her presentation, she told the students that as long as she could remember she loved to read, and read everything she could. She shared many books she had read in middle school that the students themselves were reading. She explained that this love of reading was a great help in her current work, because it provided a basic knowledge of stories and storylines, it broadened her vocabulary, and it helped her be a better writer. She was able to make it sound like reading a lot was about the coolest thing a person could do, especially if it led in some nebulous way to interviews with the cast of the “X-Men” movie, X2. Then she presented the details of the new project to them.

For Operation Hollywood students were to choose a book that has been made into a movie—one which they were allowed to watch and which could be located. Our media specialist was a great help in coming up with titles to which our library had access, and Melissa, the other teachers on my team, the students, and I all contrib-
uted to the list of books that have become movies. Students had to read their chosen books and write the book reviews before watching the movies and writing their movie reviews.

We all brought in movies, labeled with our names, which were placed in the care of the media specialist. In addition to the movies we brought, a local video store made needed videos available for free for our project. Students would let their teachers know a few days before they were ready for the movies, so one of the adults could pick them up. We tried to coordinate students who had the same title, so they could watch the video together. Sometimes students chose to watch their movies at home so they could speed the process and go on to another title. No student was allowed to use a movie rated above PG-13 for our school project.

Melissa brought in her review of the X2 movie to explain the formula for a review, as well as copies of reviews from various sources. The first words of advice for the reviews were: be honest to your opinion, don't be influenced by what others write, and don't be afraid to be the only one who likes or dislikes a book or movie, as long as it's an honest opinion. The formula for the review begins with an introductory paragraph that includes a hook and three to five sentences that introduce the review. This is followed by one or two paragraphs that summarize the plot without revealing the ending. Next, the reviewer chooses aspects of the film or book that he or she either likes or dislikes, discusses the aspect, and transitions on to a new paragraph for each new aspect. Including a concluding paragraph, the length of a movie review is typically 550 to 600 words; we used that as a standard, but differentiated to meet the needs of our diverse group of students.

To model and practice the process our entire team of 120 students plus staff read Polar Express, wrote the reviews together in class, went to see the movie, and wrote class reviews. After that students were given the lists we had created together, which change from year to year as new titles become available. They are encouraged to select titles that would interest and appropriately challenge them. Students are informed of books of which we have multiple copies, in case they chose to read as part of a small group. Some students
read several smaller books, which required writing more reviews. Some students read *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* books, which took longer to read and required fewer reviews. Reading and English classes on the team worked together on the project, and students could be found at various points in the progression in either class. There were intermediate deadlines that needed to be somewhat flexible, and a final deadline which came with the end of the grading period.

The unit is built around skills or concepts that are the focus of the summative assessment for the grading period. One concept is voice. In reading class students kept track of examples that show strong voice in their readings, and share and discuss their examples. In English class students are expected to show their own voice in writing reviews. Word choice is also assessed, prompting students to find wonderful words in the reading, and use wonderful word choice in their reviews. Organization and conventions are also assessed in English; this was a third quarter project, so students were bringing together several parts of their writing. Finally, learning elements of fiction was a focus both in the books the students were reading and in the book and movie reviews they were writing. The movie and book reviews were really just the vehicles that provided a more enjoyable ride through the unit.

Operation Hollywood: From Page to Screen has been beneficial for our students in several ways. One is that they were doing work that people in the working world really do. Some chose to have their reviews displayed in the halls, the library, the video store that was so supportive, or the school newspaper. Some just shared with some of their classmates. They also became more aware of reviews in newspapers. Another benefit is the connections they were able to make between reading and writing, and seeing that increased reading can help sharpen writing skills. Perhaps most important were the students’ connections as authors. Focussing on traits like voice and word choice in the books they were reading and then using that same lens to examine their own writing not only helps them improve their reviews, it causes them to see themselves as real writers. On our team we anticipate Operation Hollywood like it was the Oscars.

Sixth grade students can write about characters going through experiences span the globe: Japanese-Americans in the internment camps, or a Mexican peasant, or a young girl writing in England. She may be a teenager or a 14-year-old boy, or a responsibility when her mother is absent. Some students are involved an English class because they are intelligent rather than to fulfill their dream of what they do in their own lives.

Karen Bejin and Julie Haas developed a unit of study which involves A.8.1 & A.8.2. One of their purposes in reading and analyze literature. From themes or understanding:

- Overcoming adversity
- Taking on responsibility
- Showing growth over time
- Finding strength in weakness
- Going above and beyond
- Making personal decisions

**How do we begin?**

Julie and Karen chose to go above and beyond. They heard about a health team. Their fellow colleague, she
Above and Beyond
by Jayne Woodburn

Sixth grade students on team G spend three weeks each year reading about characters going above and beyond. The characters and experiences span the globe over different time periods. Some read about Japanese-Americans surviving internment camps and racial prejudice, or a Mexican princess who must journey north to California and live the life of a migrant worker in order to survive. Others know a young girl writing in her diary to describe her life in 16th century England. She may be forced to marry the man of her parent’s choosing or a 14-year-old boy who is suddenly thrust into an adult world of responsibility when he must care for 6,000 sheep all alone, for a summer. Some students are challenged to read more difficult books. One involved an English character learning that people of the rainforest are intelligent rather than simple. The characters in that story are able to fulfill their dream quest, as we hope our students will be inspired to do in their own lives.

Karen Bejin and Julie Toske spent a great deal of time preparing this unit of study which incorporates two Wisconsin Reading Standards (A.8.1 & A.8.2). One is to use effective reading strategies to achieve their purposes in reading; the other is to read, interpret, and critically analyze literature. From these standards, they developed seven sub-themes or understandings which students apply as they read.

• Overcoming adversity
• Taking on responsibility
• Showing growth of character
• Finding strength one didn’t know one had
• Going above and beyond others’ expectations
• Going above and beyond one’s own expectations
• Making personal discovery

How do we begin?
Julie and Karen choose speakers that have personal stories of going above and beyond in their daily life. This past year, our students heard about a health teacher who gave part of her liver to help a fellow colleague. She described the process of healing afterwards.
and how her friend was helped. Another health teacher described her battle with cancer and chemotherapy as a high school student, losing her hair in the process. Today, she is a healthy adult with a small child. Many of our students who have difficulty learning or being in school were inspired to hear from our principal who described her battle with reading difficulties in elementary school.

After the presentations, the students hear book talks from our reading specialist. Then they choose the book they would most like to read. The teachers on our team make the final selections for students based on reading level and availability of books.

**Book Groups**
Each of the book groups is kept at a minimum of 10 students to allow for more active discussion as well as manageability for teachers. We are able to use additional staff to lead the book groups. Our teacher for the gifted and talented and our reading coordinator become involved. Student teachers also take a group. All of our students are in a book group, regardless of ability level. We have a wide range of students, so all of our special education staff is included in the book groups.

**Class activities**
Specific activities in the project are standards based. Some include text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world comparisons for each of the books read. We focus on predictions as well as reflections on how the character’s lives may parallel the student’s experiences. Students also evaluate the credibility of the story and ask why the author made the choice to write that story.

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**Final presentations**
At the end of the unit, all the students present their book to their classmates. Some students write a book review for the class to read, present a dramatic reading of a favorite part, make a poster display of their reading, and tell a personal story relating to the book. Some students bring in props related to the theme of the novel which illustrate their story in a personal way. Some students create their own puppet show or a poster presentation. Others take on the role of the author and prepare a presentation on how they wrote the book. All students learn to give an informative presentation rather than just reading from the chapters. Their presentations are a true highlight of the unit. Some students are known as the 'watch and then evaluate' type. They have found as they present that they have just as much fun as the people of all ages going to their presentations. They have enjoyed the power of the book and the joy they see.

Lastly, we view the movie *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. The Canadian geese.

**Summative assessment**
There is a skills-based test given at the end of the unit. We look back throughout the unit at all of the books that are chosen to see how the students are growing as readers and stretching their abilities as learners.

This is a wonderful opportunity for the students to grow as well as meet new students and make new friends! People of all ages going to their presentations are so impressed with their work.

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**Partial list of novels we have read**
Final presentations
At the end of the unit, students give a ten-minute presentation on their novel which illustrates character growth. Some students create a power point, others make a puppet show, and many give a dramatic performance. We rehearse and present in the auditorium. One of last year’s book groups explored the conscience of the characters through their performance. That allowed them to speak more freely through their presentation rather than memorizing lines. These culminating presentations are a true highlight where the students apply the understandings they have found as they worked through the book. The other students watch and then evaluate which understanding was presented. Doing the evaluations encourages the students to pay attention and to enjoy what they see.

Lastly, we view the movie Fly Away Home to showcase the theme of people of all ages going above and beyond as they try to rescue some Canadian geese.

Summative assessment
There is a skills-based summative assessment on the last day to see what the students have learned from this unit. We also collect student feedback throughout the unit in our small groups. Each year we evaluate the books that are chosen to make certain that we are meeting student needs and stretching their ability to read and understand.

This is a wonderful opportunity for students to gain new understandings as well as meet new students and teachers. We also celebrate with a bit of cake!

Partial list of novels we have used:
DeLong's Shakespeare Festival: How It Got Started
by Rozanna Bejin

READ THIS and YOU are EIGHT YEARS AHEAD in your READING. It is not easy to get an English teacher’s reading attention, so I decided to resort to screaming capitals. AND, I have yet to hear of an English teacher that is up to date in their reading, so read on, if you finally want to be ahead in at least one journal article.

In DeLong’s English Department, we say, “Unite, English Teachers! We have EIGHT YEARS, until April 2014, to get ready for Shakespeare’s 450th birthday.” Everybody likes a party; here is a good excuse to hold a standards-based party in English. So what prompted DeLong’s interest in the Bard? In May 2005, DeLong held its first Shakespeare Festival, and it was a great success. We had more students audition for parts than our six plays could accommodate. Unfortunately, we had to turn students away, but this was not a bad problem to have. The festival preparations and the festival itself were held within the time limits of the school day. Really, holding a Shakespeare Festival does not have to take away from family time.

DeLong is a middle school of 900 students in grades 6-8. We have five English teachers in Grades 7 and 8, who each teach five sections. In Grade 6, six teachers are responsible for teaching two sections of English, one of reading, and two sections of another core class. Of these eleven English teachers, six teachers from the three grade levels chose to direct a play for the festival. Teacher participation in the festival was voluntary. DeLong’s busy teachers are pursuing diverse interests and projects going throughout the school year, as the articles in this WEJ will attest.

In this issue, I have a brief article on how we went about planning our middle school Shakespeare Festival. Our main concern was teaching the Shakespeare’s work. This could differ depending on grade level. To lower our teachers’ anxiety, we began the attitude, “We can’t.” A good example of this is when the actors started the first week of rehearsals. The school year was about to end. As it turned out, we didn’t need to worry; I didn’t even notice the end of the school year.

Of course, the best part of the festival is the play. On April 16, 2014, the seventh and eighth graders were in the Regional Arts Center to perform the Shakespeare Festival. Our goal is to now have that play taken a week-long, June workshop and festival is held, the professional actors present a workshop or field trip to the college. Also this summer, English teachers at the Rhetoric of the Drama and the Great River Shakespeare Festival will perform. The weeklong drama workshop is sponsored by and Paul Barnett. The play is various interpretations of Shakespeare accessible to the audience, the way Shakespeare himself would represent his 450th birthday celebration.
Festival: 
A Success

... teaching the students how to understand and perform Shakespeare's work. The logistics of having this sort of festival would differ depending on the school, but any school can make it work. To lower our teacher and student levels of anxiety, we worked with the attitude, “We don’t need to be perfect; let’s just do the best we can.” A good example of this adaptability came about last year when the actors in Julius Caesar had limited time for quality rehearsals. The solution? Let the actors use neatly mounted scripts. As it turned out, the students did a great, memorable performance. I didn’t even notice that some students used scripts.

Of course, the best way to understand Shakespeare is to see a play. On April 10, 2006, with the support of DeLong’s seventh and eighth-grade teachers, we took 600 students to Eau Claire’s Regional Arts Center to see Romeo and Juliet performed by GMT Productions. Our students appreciated the play, and our teachers now have that performance as a common reference for lessons we want to teach in performing our plays.

"Unite, English Teachers! We have EIGHT YEARS, until April 2014, to get ready for Shakespeare’s 450th birthday"

For teachers who want to enrich their background in Shakespeare, one great Midwestern opportunity is The Great River Shakespeare Festival in Winona, Minnesota, whose third season this summer features Twelfth Night and Romeo and Juliet. For the past two summers, another DeLong teacher and I have taken a week-long course at Winona State University, where the festival is held. The course is designed for teachers and taught by the professional directors of the festival. The class can be taken as a workshop or for college credits, offered through St. Mary’s College. Also this summer, a second class for teachers is being offered, the Rhetoric of Shakespeare, a writing class. Just check out the Great River Shakespeare website if you want more information. The weeklong classes are held in July. The teachers, Alec Wild and Paul Barnes, are down-to-earth and fun, and they make Shakespeare accessible to all age levels. It really is a “Global” experience, the way Shakespeare intended. And remember, Shakespeare’s 450th birthday comes around in April 2014. See you at the party.
Easy Planning for a Middle School Shakespeare Festival

by Rozanna Bejin

In May 2005, our school district held its first Middle School Shakespeare Festival. The teachers were delighted and amazed to see the level of enthusiasm generated by our students for playing Shakespeare. We actually had to turn students away because of the great numbers who auditioned for parts in the six plays. As an example, 41 students tried out for the part of *Hamlet*.

From this successful festival experience, we learned that middle school kids loved acting Shakespeare and that preparing the students for a festival was not a difficult or time-consuming process. We also discovered that although some adults may avoid Shakespeare, middle school students did not. Why? Because we learned a few easy teaching tips that made Shakespeare fun and accessible to our middle schoolers.

The first timesaving tip is to purchase the book *Shakespeare in the Classroom* by Dr. Albert Cullum. This book has eight of Shakespeare’s plays cut to shorter-than-an-hour productions. These cuttings maintain Shakespeare’s language, and permission is given in the book to make copies. Cullum made national news in the 1960’s for directing Shakespeare productions at his elementary school. Check out the DVD, *A Touch of Greatness*, a 2004 documentary highlighting the work of Cullum, with black and white footage of his young students acting Shakespeare and with interviews of Cullum, then in his 80’s. In short, Cullum’s book, *Shakespeare in the Classroom*, is “the wheel,” and there is no reason to reinvent it. This book saves the teacher hours of work.

To prepare middle school students to read and memorize Shakespearean language, we followed the advice of Dr. Cheryl Starr, Director of UWEC Children’s Theater, who has studied Shakespeare in London and at the Folger Library, and who has the additional experience of objecting that before reading or acting they first understand that Shakespearean version, storytellers’ adaptation can add their own touches to the play, and that the language of Shakespeare is not for the faint of heart.

Then, with the Cast in their heads, get kids ready on the blocking and costumes. For the plastic dagger, a simple to get mid-1970s no-sew plastic dagger, a set of swords, take the play acting out Shakespearean scenes. Its theater teacher from East 80th Street who followed the lead. The students were shocked by the story and action of our first Shakespeare Festival.

“Start small” is all Shakespeare Festival within our budget, 250 students. Dr. Mason was dressed in Elizabethan costume, there, sitting on stage. The scenery was highlighting the work of Cullum, with black and white footage of his young students acting Shakespeare and with interviews of Cullum, then in his 80’s. In short, Cullum’s book, *Shakespeare in the Classroom*, is “the wheel,” and there is no reason to reinvent it. This book saves the teacher hours of work.

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experience of observing many festivals. Dr. Starr recommended that before reading Shakespeare’s language, the students should first understand the story being told in the play. Reading a prose version, storytelling the plot of the play, or showing a short video adaptation can accomplish this. Many children’s books, young adult adaptations and cartoon versions of Shakespeare’s works can be found at your public library. Teach students the story being told in the play, and they quickly adapt to reading and understanding the language of Shakespeare.

Then, with the Cullum scripts in hand and with the play’s story in their heads, get kids on their feet reading lines to each other. Work on the blocking as you go along. Add a few basic props, such as a plastic dagger, a ship’s wheel, or a colorful scarf. It really is that simple to get middle school students involved and excited about acting out Shakespeare. Yes, based on the experience of six English teachers from Eau Claire’s DeLong and Northstar Middle Schools who followed these simple teaching ideas, we were pleasantly shocked by the student response and by the relative ease in holding our first Shakespeare festival.

“Start small” is always good advice for your first festival. We held our festival within the time limits of the school day and included 250 students. Dr. Starr acted as Mistress of Ceremonies and was dressed in Elizabethan costume. Even “Queen Elizabeth” was there, sitting on stage showing reactions to the plays. Costumes were designed to be used interchangeably for the six plays. The scenery merely suggested a location: an artificial tree for the forest, a table for a castle.

We also toyed with slides projecting pictures of castles (Hamlet), ocean beaches (The Tempest), and Roman pillars (Julius Caesar) beaming on our auditorium walls during each play’s performance. Add a touch of Renaissance music, a few refreshments, a court jester, and sonnet readers between plays. Start with Albert Cullum’s book, Shakespeare in the Classroom, teach the students the story being told in the play, and then get kids up and acting. That’s all it takes for a successful middle school Shakespeare Festival.
The Bard and the Baritone on a Bus Tour  
by Jovin Kroll

Walk into any high school or freshman-level college classroom, mention the name William Shakespeare, and wait for the reaction. The most likely scenario is a reception of terrified looks from the students, combined with groans, moans, and the occasional whimpers of “do we have to?” For whatever reason, whether it is the elevated language or the length of his plays, Shakespeare has come to be feared by a lot of students.

This is one of the reasons that I was so excited to get a chance to sit in on Mr. Ken Walden’s seventh-grade classroom at DeLong Middle School in Eau Claire. Being a pre-professional English teacher, I naturally relished the opportunity to see how another teacher chooses to introduce Shakespeare to his students. What really intrigued me in this instance was the fact that Mr. Walden was doing this introduction with seventh graders. Since a large percentage of my fellow English majors at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls still have their reservations about reading and comprehending Shakespeare, I had doubts as to how much these seventh graders could really gain from this early bout with Shakespeare.

My doubts were further reinforced when Mr. Walden informed me about ten minutes prior to class that I would be sitting in on a PowerPoint presentation on Shakespeare. Nothing in my sixteen years as a student has allowed me to be more passive and uninvolved in a classroom than the use of PowerPoint, which normally requires at least one student in the classroom to be shaken awake at some point before the final slide is flashed upon the projection screen. Furthermore, I’d be sitting in on the first class period of the day, which started ten minutes before eight o’clock, when students usually seem to be incapable of uttering more than a few words at a time.

When I entered the classroom, I was greeted with an enthusiastic response. The students were all sitting up straight, eager to learn more about Shakespeare. Mr. Walden opened the class by introducing the Bard as a literary giant who has influenced countless writers and artists throughout history. He went over some of Shakespeare’s most famous plays, such as Romeo and Juliet, and talked about the importance of Shakespeare’s contributions to literature.

What followed was a lively discussion among the students, who seemed to be engaged and interested in the topic. They asked questions about Shakespeare’s life and times, and how his works have stood the test of time. Mr. Walden was able to answer most of their questions, and even added some insight of his own.

The PowerPoint presentation included images of Shakespeare and the plays he wrote, as well as a timeline of his life and career. The students were able to see the progression of his work, and how he evolved as a writer over the years. They also learned about the different genres of Shakespeare’s plays, such as tragedy, comedy, and history.

The tour continued...
When I entered Mr. Walden’s classroom, my heart immediately went out to him. On top of all the other potential drains on student enthusiasm, he was in a room with no windows. I realized that unless this young teacher, in his first year at DeLong after a few years in the Anoka-Hennepin District, was truly a special teacher, he was in for a long hour.

What followed was one of the most involved and enjoyable hours of learning I have ever experienced. From the minute students entered the classroom, it was clear that they had a trusting relationship with their teacher. By the time Mr. Walden had intoned his opening remarks in a comical baritone voice, with student critical response no less harsh than Randy, Paula, and Simon would have been on American Idol, the attendance had been taken, the Pledge of Allegiance was spoken, and the mood was set for a fun and student-involved forty-four minutes of Shakespearean exploration.

The PowerPoint that I initially dreaded proved to be an in-depth look at Shakespeare’s England, featuring videos, interactive websites, and notes. While most PowerPoint presentations are given by a teacher standing in front lecturing, Mr. Walden delivered his material sitting amongst his students, making it feel that we were on a tour bus with him as the guide.

Mr. Walden talked about Shakespeare’s contemporaries, the process of editing his plays, and the actors who acted in them. He had such a conversational style about his presentation that the kids seemed to forget that they were supposed to be afraid of Shakespeare. The students continually chimed in with questions that he enthusiastically answered.

One of the neatest things about his presentation was that he was able to show the students numerous photos of the Globe Theatre. He went over staging strategies, the use of an aside, the trap door that allowed ghosts to come up from the underworld, and the apparatus that enabled actors to float above the stage. The kids fired off questions about where the queen sat, why there weren’t seats for the groundlings, why all the actors were male, and what happened to the theatre when it rained.

The tour continued with a look at some of the words and phrases
Shakespeare is credited with coining. Instead of just listing a group of phrases on the PowerPoint, Mr. Walden used the *Classics in the Classroom* website, which forced students to wait with anticipation for each new expression to be blurted out by a character after the individual was clicked on by Mr. Walden. At one point Mr. Walden waved his arms, nearly flying out of his chair, emphatically stating, “He invented the word ‘luggage,’ for goodness sakes!”

The PowerPoint also included a video featuring a range of different people: young, old, male and female, speaking out the words to the famous “To be, or not to be” speech, followed by one actor performing the scene in a modern version of *Hamlet*. Walden delved a little into the meaning of the speech, but he mainly seemed to be trying to get the students to just enjoy and appreciate it, which they certainly did.

All of this background information on Shakespeare is part of a two-week introduction before the class actually reads a modern-language, prose version of *Hamlet*. From my one day of observing, it was clear that Mr. Walden succeeded tremendously in breaking down any kind of fear his students may have had of Shakespeare. When the day’s portion of the PowerPoint was over, students continued to probe Mr. Walden with Shakespeare-related questions. It was clear from students’ inquiries that both Mr. Walden and his students are looking forward to the day when he takes to the stage, armed with a vast array of dark Shakespearean verses, to perform at one of the “primetime” poetry readings that occur on some Fridays.

After a poetry assignment was given out and the students said their goodbyes and headed out for the day, Mr. Walden stated the obvious to me: “I’m having so much fun,” he said. He was not the only one; never before, even in my college classes, have I seen students so involved in a discussion about Shakespeare. “They love it,” he responded; “they completely love Shakespeare.” When a teacher has the enthusiasm and knowledge of his subject equal to the level of Mr. Ken Walden, it’s impossible for them not to.

**Project Made Easy**

*by Susan F. Ernst*

*Write a grant proposal to project.*

A decade ago the Haldimand County Environmental Education Committee was founded. The focus was on providing environmental education to elementary and secondary schools. Mr. Tom Long’s back parcel of land had been purchased out of a desire to teach the students about where they were from. It was an extension in the concept of environmental education. The teachers would make observations and they would start monitoring what was happening in their local waterways. A group of sixth graders was formed and they started a monitoring project. The teachers would meet and discuss the observations and whether something was happening to the waterways. Even before the Haldimand County Environmental Education Committee had evolved, the students were excited to be a part of it. They started growing a garden and they learned about the water quality in the various creeks and streams in their community. They were able to take part in monitoring the water quality, and they learned about the importance of protecting the environment.

The outdoor classroom project was then expanded to include a variety of activities. The students were able to participate in various projects, including the construction of a model wind turbine, the creation of a composting system, and the planting of trees. The students were also able to participate in field trips to local parks and nature reserves. They were able to learn about the importance of conservation and sustainability, and they were able to apply what they learned in the classroom to real-world situations.

Mark was the main organizer of the outdoor classroom project. He was passionate about the environment and he was determined to make a difference. He was able to get funding for the project from various sources, including local businesses and community organizations. Mark was a true visionary, and he was able to create a project that was both educational and engaging for the students.

Today, Project Made Easy has grown to include classrooms on both sides of the border. The project is still in its early stages, but it is already having a positive impact on the education of students. It is proving that environmental education can be taught effectively, and that it can be a fun and engaging experience for students. The project is helping to create a new generation of environmental stewards, and it is helping to protect our natural resources for future generations.
Project Moon BEAMS
by Susan Huston & Joan Bachmeier

Write a grant. Win the grant. Order 10 canoes, trailer, paddles and life jackets. AND............

A decade ago the canoes and equipment were delivered to De-Long’s back parking lot with the intention of being used as an extension in the seventh grade science classrooms. As Mark Veneziano, sixth grade teacher, parked his truck by the forgotten canoes, he visualized sixth graders canoeing the shores of Half Moon Lake, making observation notes, recording aquatic plant life, studying the water quality, and enriching their knowledge of this historical site in our community—Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He approached his teaching partner and administrators with his innovative idea of an outdoor classroom for two days a week for approximately six to eight weeks at Carson Park, which is almost completely surrounded by Half Moon Lake. It’s a beautiful and wonderfully equipped park, including pavilions, play areas, hiking trails, athletic fields, and the Chippewa Valley Museum. So with a lot of imagination and creativity and enormous support from his partner, Anna Bruecker (Grunwald), and administrators, Project Moon BEAMS (Being Environmentally Aware of My Surroundings) was born.

Mark was the mastermind behind the science and math applications involved in an outdoor classroom, while Anna spearheaded the curriculum for the language area, reading and writing. In the fall of 1999, Mark and Anna bravely took fifty students to an onsite, hands-on classroom where they could tackle environmental education in Eau Claire’s own backyard. Did the project succeed? Yes. And where is the program today?

Today, Project Moon BEAMS has expanded to include all four classrooms on Team H at DeLong Middle School. The goal of this project is threefold. We incorporate local and state curriculum standards. While accomplishing this, we encourage our students to
become responsible contributors to their community. Most importantly, we strive to establish an understanding and a “caring” for nature and the environment. Each day at the lake involves two teachers, two student teachers, and approximately fifty very excited students from our regular education and Title I programs.

At first glance, this seems like a science-centered project; what in the world does it have to do with Communication Arts? How were we going to make the project a success as an integrated unit? One thing we knew for sure: we didn’t want it to be a forced fit. The key was to look at our curriculum and decide which objectives fit in an outdoor classroom and could also be carried throughout the school year. The result has become an annual adventure filled with laughter, learning, and the occasional splash.

As twenty-five students venture out in the canoes, twenty-five more stay back on land working on a variety of activities. Journaling is a daily occurrence because we want students to reflect on the unique experience of learning at the lake. Because it is early in the year, the journal gives us a chance to monitor the students’ writing skills and to teach them the proper method to organize and write paragraphs.

One of the biggest projects tackled is called “Interview a Critter.” Equipped with nets and Petri dishes, the students head out to collect critters like crayfish, scuds, and water striders. The students use their senses to observe their critters, taking notes on the movement and appearance. Before releasing their critters back into nature, they make large drawings of them that will later be recreated as watercolor paintings. After the observations have been made, we teach the students research strategies. They look for information that will later be organized and rewritten as questions and answers in the creation of radio interview programs with their critters as the guests. “Interview a Critter” gives the students an opportunity to unite their scientific knowledge with their creative writing skills as they infuse humor and voice into their scripts.

The beautiful setting of Half Moon Lake transitioning from summer to autumn is the perfect inspiration for writing. As the breeze grows crisper, the students start describing their time in silent observation of what they see, hearing, and use to write a science journal and “Critter” writing.

Besides writing, reading various novels and works focus on comparing and contrasting biomes (prairie, desert). The students learn about animals and plants in the environmental area. Craighead book, “Save the Rainforest” in Florida who questions if the humans are doing anything as a springboard to be part of the world’s environment and

After six weeks of study, the students are ready to gather information gathered in earlier presentations report their reflection almost all students garner the opportunity to read to teachers, family members.

Today, the canoes are in jackets hung in the trees. In September, Team 2, a batch of sixth grade sixth sion splash.
grows crisper, the leaves brighten, and the mallards migrate, we start describing the changes through descriptive writing. Spending time in silent observation gives the students the opportunity to note what they see, hear, feel, and smell. These observations are later used to write a series of Haiku poems and enhance their journal and “Critter” writings.

Besides writing, the students spend a portion of their day reading various novels by the author Jean Craighead George, whose works focus on different aspects of the environment. Students compare and contrast the different biomes when reading her “One Day In the…” series, of which there is one title for each of the biomes (prairie, deciduous forest, alpine tundra, rain forest, desert). The students create classroom booklets featuring the various animals and plants found in the biomes as well as discussing the environmental advantages and problems in those regions. Another Craighead book, The Talking Earth, about a young Seminole girl in Florida who questions her tribe’s beliefs and then observes what humans are doing to negatively affect the environment, is read as a springboard for discussing many issues that arise in our own part of the world. All of these books open our students’ eyes to the environment and the importance of studying and protecting it.

After six weeks of canoeing, observing, reading, and writing, the students are ready for our culminating project. Using all of the information gathered at the lake, the students prepare Power Point presentations reporting their learning, the last slide being a final reflection almost always singing praises to the experience. Bringing the information together for their final presentation gives students the opportunity to share what they’ve learned with classmates, teachers, family members, and community members.

Today, the canoes are stored, the paddles put away, and the life-jackets hung in the science storeroom, but as school bells ring in September, Team H will be back at Half Moon Lake with a new batch of sixth graders ready to laugh, learn, and make the occasional splash.
The Last River Rat: Kenny Salwey's Life in the Wild
by Ken Walden

Along the banks of the Mississippi where the waters separate Minnesota from Wisconsin, people speak still of a legendary modern-day river rat, the last river rat.
This man is Kenny Salwey.

During the school year, our seventh grade team teaches an interdisciplinary unit that combines the English and Science classes. Our guide is The Last River Rat, by J. Scott Bestul and Kenny Salwey. Salwey is the key to our unit.

The book's narrator follows Kenny around for a year out on his swampland, describing his monthly adventures in trapping, hunting, watching, waiting, and anticipating. The book's chapters are the months of what Kenny calls "the life circle." He takes us through the adventures of living along the Mississippi River in Alma, Wisconsin, during Wisconsin's four distinct seasons. Those seasons, so perfect in their simplicity out in the forest, serve as the main backdrop for everything that inspires the reader.

In the autumnal season, we read of Kenny and his scribe going off to look for fall colors, so distinctive in the brilliancy of the red, orange, magenta, and yellow that the tourist trade has made it an annual must-see experience. Kenny negotiates the backwaters of Whitman Swamp, where his one-man cabin is located. He experiences the thrill of duck hunting with true duck hunting Labradors, and speaks about the co-existence of man and dog during hunting excursions. His vivid descriptions grip readers and pull them into the story. We feel as though we, too, are slugging through the muck and water in the swamp.

One of the favorite parts is December. Kenny butchers his convict of home labor of butcher's techniques.

What makes this even more interesting is the science component. We see the process from beginning to end.

Our science teacher killed a doe the previous Sunday and plans to return from weddings Monday, after we have a class about Kenny's deer, the student class and observing the most important lesson: how to make the meat was made.

After all of these adventures, we wait for Kenny Salwey and his scribe to visit his shack, real-life setting with the near and hides, to the swampland and much of the Wisconsin swampland areas such as...
One of the favorite months/chapters for the students and the teachers is December, when they learn about deer hunting and skinning. Kenny butchers and skins two deer himself, and writes with great conviction of how much better the meat tastes when the vigorous labor of butchering is complete and the spoils are eaten.

What makes this part of the unit even more interesting is the science component, where students see the process for themselves. Our science teacher, a bow hunter, killed a doe the day before we were to return from winter recess. That Monday, after we read in English class about Kenny butchering his deer, the students went to science class and observed the science teacher doing the same thing. The most important lesson was not to waste any part of the doe. The eighth grade biology class took the organs and dissected them, and the meat was made into venison jerky for the kids to sample.

After all of these experiences in the class, we decided to call Kenny Salwey and ask him to speak to us. He invited our classes to visit his shack. Last year's students were amazed at how the real-life setting was described perfectly in the book. To his skins and hides, to the shed where the butchering is done, we saw how much of the Wisconsin heritage is kept alive in the backwaters and swampy areas surrounding the Mississippi River shore.
Binding Advancement of ELL Students Into the Straight Jacket of English Rhetorical Patterns
by Mark Tafel

Binding? Straightjacket!! Not the words that would be used to describe the teaching philosophy at DeLong Middle School. They are figures of speech that highlight one of the dilemmas facing all ELL (English Language Learner) students -- learning to recognize and use the very restrictive rhetorical patterns that the English-speaking academic world prizes. For English teachers, this means being aware that culture-specific values are imbedded in a student’s native culture’s writing patterns and that when these patterns are transferred to English writing, there are problems.

Robert Kaplan in his groundbreaking work, “Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education” (1966) argued that writing styles differ in different languages and the writing problems of ELL students can be partially explained by transfer of an L1 (native or first language) writing style into an L2 (English). Kaplan’s article established the field of contrastive rhetoric -- the comparative study of writing styles in different languages for the purpose of facilitating writing in a second language. Kaplan’s famous diagrams that illustrate these differences are as follows:

![Diagram of writing styles in different languages]

Back to the point that most of the rest of the language predicts, I have made no progress. I have left my readers saying only to read a straight arrow paragraph non-confrontational and Chinese students in winning an argument valued in our intercultural let’s say, are more likely to discover that is clearly different than can newspapers.

I am aware that I realize the danger I am also aware that it is too simplistic. I have observed native students’ attempts resemble Kaplan's diagrams.
English writing is represented by a straight line, which illustrates English writers’ predisposition to stick to the point. Imbedded in this style is the cultural value of not wasting time. We bang out a general statement (thesis), and we support with just enough relevant details until we rush to a conclusion. Bing, bang, bong. Sounds easy, right? Not if you are a native writer of Hebrew, Chinese, French/Italian/Spanish, or Russian.

The Semitic rhetorical pattern, for instance, is best represented by Jesus’ attempts to describe the kingdom of heaven. He said it is like a mustard seed, like unleavened bread, like an empty jar, like the unfaithful servant.....The series of parables do not directly tell us what the “kingdom of heaven” is. They are parallel stories that are linked by a common theme. I have never had a Semitic ELL student at DeLong, but I am sure you can see in this example the zigzag pattern that Kaplan discovered.

Back to the point! All of the students I have had are from the rest of the language groups in Kaplan’s diagram. As the diagram predicts, I have observed that native Spanish writers feel free to digress. I have lost track of the thread of native Russian writers’ essays only to recover it at the end. The starkest contrast to English’s straight arrow pattern is the inward spiral of “Orientals.” This non-confrontational style reflects the group orientation of Hmong and Chinese students. It shows that the writer is not interested in winning an argument or stating an opinion, two skills that are valued in our individual-oriented society. Rather, Chinese writers, let’s say, are more interested in revealing a truth that the reader is led to discover after the presentation of many points of view. This is clearly different from the saber rattling prose we read in American newspapers’ “Letters to the Editor” section.

I am aware that I am dealing in cultural stereotypes here, and do realize the danger and shortsightedness involved in this practice. I am also aware that Kaplan’s work has been attacked for being too simplistic. But over many years of teaching ELL, I have also observed native-culture rhetorical patterns bleeding through ELL students’ attempts at English prose, and the stains that are left resemble Kaplan’s diagrams. It is my job to turn those zigzags
and spirals into straight lines. I feel, sometimes very uncomfortably, like a cultural orthodontist, fitting each student I have with an all-American smile.

In her workshops in ELL methodology, Jo Gusman, founder of New Horizon in Education, Inc., has participants pair up and bear hug each other, while saying, “Students do not acquire English. English (bear hug) acquires them.” It is a startling way to start a workshop. But it is also startling to have your native linguistic inards pulled out, and have them replaced with English ones.

What is being a teacher of writing expository prose to advanced ELL students like? It’s like being an Ellis Island bureaucratic thug, like a carnival snake oil salesman, like a severe psychiatrist, like a mad tailor. Juan! Don’t write about your grandmother when your essay is about the immune system! Weng Ying! Take a stand – tell me how you really feel about middle school cafeteria food. The rest of you? Come this way, and let me measure you for your next straightjacket in the compare-and-contrast-essay fitting room.

I know my students need to see the value of, let’s say, the five-paragraph essay. Expository forms such as this one will serve them best in school and in their future careers in their new country. The structure of paragraphs, the cementing effect of transition words, the general statements of topic sentences, the specifics of supporting sentences, the skill of paraphrasing in composing conclusions – there is an aesthetic to all of these English prose pieces and the ways they are organized that kids can recognize, appreciate, and use with confidence.

How do I get them to acquire these orchestrated pieces? First, I present the Kaplan diagrams. I think the ELL students like seeing themselves in them. The diagrams also prepare them for what is expected in English prose. Next, I present many models of good and bad one-paragraph essays written by former students and myself. I point out their structural features, and the class and I identify aspects of each that distinguishes good and bad writing. Sometimes the bad writing is attributed to the influence of native-language rhetorical patterns as Kaplan had discovered. To force a familiarity with the possibilities, I have students write one-sentence summaries of the things they have written. They have to present their ideas in a modest paragraph and a challenge to others that they have to present their ideas in a sentence fitting out the idea.

The rest of this class is a case of opportunity where potentially dry reader work with Margaret at the Public School. Philosophy is not enough. Again, have the students get it right. Philosophy is being on the same page for them to think in unison.

The last task is to get the potential of English writers to produce more plausible English prose. The way, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, uh huh, 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familiarity with terms topic sentence, transition words, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences, I give groups of three or four, a modest pile of Duplo blocks in four or five different colors, and I challenge them to build good English paragraphs with them. They have to present their construction to the rest of the class by point-
ing out the paragraph features mentioned above.

The rest of the recipe is the tried-and-true blend of providing a lot of opportunities to practice these forms and injecting the potentially dry routine of paragraph writing with lots of humor. I concur with Margaret Grotz, age 85, the first ELL teacher in Eau Claire Public Schools and one of my many mentors. Her teaching philosophy is “Say it, have them do it, have them do it again, say it again, have them to do again, say it again, over and over, until they get it right.” Of course, what this really means in the 21st Century is being on the constant lookout for new and authentic situations for them to strut their writing stuff, English style.

The last trade secret I am willing to share with you is the untapped potential of KC and the Sunshine Band. There is no better nor more plausible response to many questions such as “Why do English writers write this way?” than, singing and dancing, “That’s the way, uh huh uh huh, we like it, uh huh uh huh.” Nothing loosens up the straightjacket straps faster than a little desk-side celebration of the absurd.
Remembering Anne Frank
by Michael Garrity

Question: How does one create a memory, connect students to quality learning, promote intellectual curiosity, foster creativity, and appreciate the best of human values, while allowing students to self-select from a variety of reading and writing choices?

Answer: Our DeLong Middle School 8th Grade Anne Frank Unit! After asking students what they know about World War II and Anne Frank, I provide them with a brief background on World War II, Adolf Hitler, and the Nazis, focusing on the Holocaust. Students are immersed in background notes, picture books, Holocaust survivor stories, Holocaust poetry, maps, a history of the Frank family, and films from the era. Following the introduction, students sign up for reading The Diary of Anne Frank out loud in class. Just prior to starting our classroom reading/acting of the play, I show pictures and blueprints of the secret annex in Amsterdam used by the occupants as they hid for over two years.

We pause a few days later to talk about project ideas. Working alone or with one or more partners, students self-select from a variety of possible writing projects: personal diary, short story, poetry, research paper, film script and more, all related to such themes as war, survival, hiding, resiliency, oppression, and prejudice.

In addition to the writing component, students choose a text from among a wide variety of primarily historical fiction novels (over seventy-five!) and some non-fiction. While many of the novels are set in World War II, some depict other conflicts, such as the American Revolutionary War, Vietnam, and Iraq.

Here are four examples from the set of books the students might choose to read:

•Daniel’s Story, by Carol Matas, in which Daniel and his family face the dangers threatening the Jews in Hitler’s Germany.

In the later project, students will vote, own their own Anne Frank, from their experience, etc.

•Farewell to the Conciliation, which portrays the story of a young girl who loses her family and is uprooted by the German occupation.

•My Hundred Thousand Dreams, the story of a young girl who loses her family and is uprooted from Poland to Germany.

•Soldier X, about a young protagonist, Eike, who leaves his hometown for when he is 14 years old to survive in a killing field, writes about his early sights. Covering aspects of the war in another way.

Students choose a book from class about the book talks in small groups.

In addition to the reading component, students will be able to create such things as a poster that represents their main themes: "What I Did The Night Before" or "What I Did The Night Before". After their reading, write a summary of their project. Answers should include:

•a diary of Anne Frank
•a letter from Anne Frank to you
•a short story
in the late 1930s. No longer able to practice their religion, vote, own property, or even work, Daniel’s family is forced from their home in Frankfurt and sent on a long, dangerous journey, ending in the Nazi death camp Auschwitz.

• *Farewell to Manzanar*, by Jeanne Houston and James Houston, which describes the experience of Jeanne Wakatsuki and her family. They were one of the Japanese-American families uprooted from their home and sent to live in an American internment camp along with 10,000 other Japanese-Americans.

• *My Hundred Children*, by Lena Kuchler-Silberman, a true story in which a Jewish woman avoids capture throughout the war and courageously leads a hundred Jewish children from Poland to Israel.

• *Soldier X*, by Don Wulffson, whose sixteen-year-old protagonist, Erik Brandt, barely knows what Germany is fighting for when he is drafted into Hitler's army in 1944. Sent to the killing fields of the Eastern Front, he is surrounded by horrific sights. Covered in blood and seriously injured, he conceives of another way to survive.

Students choose from a variety of reader responses as they write about the book they have chosen. Students are asked to do brief book talks in small group settings.

In addition to the reading and writing components, I invite students to create such things as art, engineering, and film projects to augment their main required project. I ask them to maintain a weekly “What I Did This Week Log” that details the time they spent doing their reading, writing, researching, or art and engineering work for their project. At the end of the unit, students have an opportunity to present/display their projects to the class. Examples of projects include:

• a diary of recorded daily events, thoughts, and feelings (as if you had to go into hiding)
• a short story in which a teenager moves from 1940s Germany
to the United States and encounters hostility at school and at home
• a poem written from the point of view of Jewish prisoners, German guards, and Allied liberators
• a research paper on the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
• a film script representing deceased characters who have come back to life to tell their story of discrimination (on film)
• a letter written to and from Anne Frank
• a cardboard model of the Anne Frank secret annex
• a Lego model of a German U-boat
• a wooden model of a concentration camp
• a model of the battleship Arizona sunk at Pearl Harbor
• a banner depicting the life of Anne Frank
• a cloth identification badge like those worn by prisoners in concentration camps
• and much, much more!

Allowing students to self-select a project idea allows for different learning styles, provides different kinds of resources and expressions for learning, and creates a memory for each student that transcends even the content of the unit.

As we read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, we identify and discuss literary devices and discuss numerous aspects of the story. Students experience not only the daily observations, but also the hopes, dreams, fears, and amazing insights of Anne Frank. For example, when Anne Frank says that when she cannot stand being “cooped up” any longer and “thinks herself out” by going for a walk in the park with her father, we talk about what that says about her strength of character. In addition, students admire her when she declares, “I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are really good at heart.” By the end of the unit, my students and I feel almost as if we have known Anne Frank, as if we have walked with her on her journey, and have learned from and appreciated her legacy. *The Diary of Anne Frank* is quality literature for the ages.