

Oklahoma English Journal

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The Survivor Tree: A Beacon of Hope for Oklahoma
(Cover Art Credit: Michelle Boyd Waters, 2022)

Beacons of Hope

The Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English. We promote improvement in the teaching of all phases of English language arts including reading, writing, creative and critical thinking, listening, and speaking at all levels of education. We are committed to addressing current issues in literacy and language arts learning, instructional practice, and education policy, as well as research in the fields of humanities, literacy, language learning, and English language arts. We do our best to help English and humanities teachers become more effective by providing the best professional development at the lowest possible cost, sponsoring a spring and fall conference. OKCTE members work together across the state and region to support excellence in language arts learning and teaching.

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The *Oklahoma English Journal* is a peer reviewed journal, published by the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English as an affiliate journal of the National Council of Teachers of English. OEJ publishes articles of interest to classroom teachers, librarians, administrators, and university professors across literacy studies and the humanities regardless of teaching level.

Submission Guidelines

Authors are invited to submit creative, multimodal submissions as well as traditional texts. OEJ encourages many forms of communication including poetry, prose, narrative, graphic stories, art, and photography.

- **Research Articles** should be organized around the following categories: introduction, literature review/theoretical framework, methods, findings, discussion, and implications for future research, practice, and policy.

- **Practitioner Articles** should be theoretically sound and pedagogically applicable.
- Both research articles and practitioner articles, including references and appendices, should be less than 4,000 words.
- **Reflections, Expert voices, Geographical views and Teaching tips** should be less than 1,500 words.
- **Book reviews** should be between 250 and 1,000 words, including a brief synopsis of the text, as well as possible teaching ideas, accompanying texts, and personal response.
- We welcome **P-12 student book reviews and essays**, including co-authored reviews: student/teacher, student/ student, and student/caregiver. Co-authored book reviews should explore both perspectives of the same young adult or children's literature text.
- We welcome **P-12 visual art**, especially connected to or inspired by reading.

Acknowledgements

The current Oklahoma English Journal co-editors are Michelle Waters and Jennifer Williams. You can reach them at OKEngJournal@gmail.com. Michelle and Jennifer will serve as OEJ editors from 2020-2025 (5 year term).

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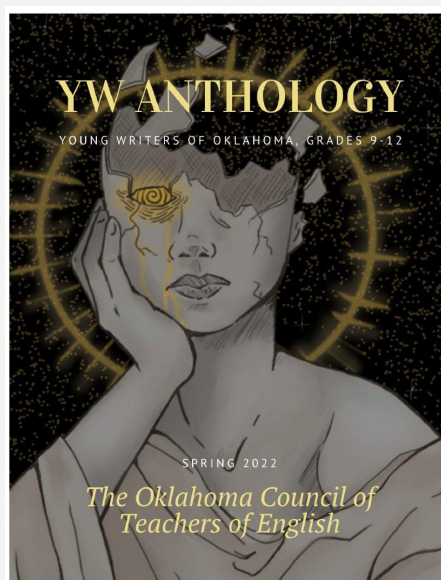
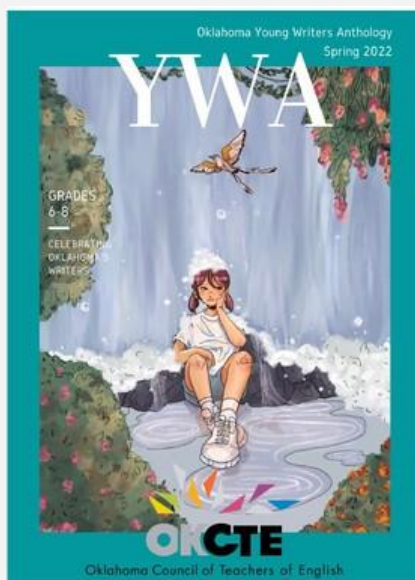
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OKCTE Young Writers Anthology 2023

Entries due January 15, 2023 by teachers via [Google form](#) (See [Rubrics](#))

The Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English (OKCTE) amplifies and celebrates the work of grades 6-12 writers and the teachers who support them. OKCTE publishes **two** Oklahoma student anthologies – one for writers in grades 6-8 and one for writers in grades 9-12 – to encourage writers to consider more closely their intended **audience**. We hope the anthologies will be powerful mentor texts in classrooms across Oklahoma. See [here](#) for past publications online and available in paperback.



From the Editors

Michelle Boyd Waters and Jennifer Williams

When Jennifer and I took over the editorship of the Oklahoma English Journal in 2020, we were both classroom teachers in Oklahoma Public Schools. Both of us served students from across many facets of our society and have worked to ensure that all of our students are seen and their educational and community needs met.

Since then, we have both stepped out of our the traditional teacher roles and into positions where we can better grow and learn to support and advocate for those who remain in our state's classrooms. Jennifer serves as an instructor at the University of Oklahoma and graduate assistant and doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. Michelle is a graduate assistant and doctoral student at OU.

With the passage of HB 1775 and similar legislation and policies, it is imperative that we find ways to encourage, support, and advocate for our colleagues in Oklahoma classrooms. As we network with educators around the country, conduct our research into effective, affirming, and relevant pedagogies and curriculum, we must bring back the knowledge and expertise that will serve as beacons of hope to those still on the frontlines.

In this issue, we have a piece that speaks truth about the impact of vouchers on our current educational system. Another text explores the complexities of building mutually respectful mentoring relationships in an ever-changing teaching workforce in which we have lost more than 10 percent of teachers since 2012. Three students submitted their concrete poems and were chosen to be published. An Oklahoma professor wrote a book review over a young adult novel, *The Blackbird Girls* by Anne Blackman, published in 2020. The book won the 2020 National Jewish Book Award for Middle Grade Literature.

A teacher from a Tulsa alternative high school writes about how literature can serve as a beacon of hope -- both as a guide and a warning, much like actual lighthouses do for ship captains. An elementary student shares a mythological short story and illustration she drew to represent her story. Finally, an Oklahoma teacher shares four poems illustrating different ways that people can learn.

We hope these pieces shine a light in your world and remind you we are not alone in our work. Maybe in this time of increasing attacks against public education, we can find strength together. Even as society continues to fracture, we will remember we have a community. Take care of yourselves as we must take care of each other.

The Silent Side of Vouchers

Dr. Jennie L. Hanna

Educating adolescents to become purposeful citizens of our world requires two things: exposure to and acceptance of diversity and cultivating empathy for others. Of course, this is often easier said than done. And the continued proliferation of educational voucher programs is making it even harder. The power of positive word connotation is hard to deny. The words we select matter, so it's no wonder a program built around the word "choice" is so tempting. What parents would not "choose" the best of everything for their child? The problem is that this allows a loophole for parents to select just how diverse their child's school really is.

Vouchers not the new kid on the block

Voucher proponents like to tout they were designed to allow marginalized groups better educational opportunities. As with other examples of revisionist history, they conveniently forget the program's foundation (O'Brien, 1996). Educational vouchers inception is attributed to a combination of mandatory school desegregation through *Brown V. Board of Education* in 1954 and economist Milton Friedman who, in 1955, stated the government should pay to educate all students, but parents should have the power to choose how to use that money (Carey, 2017). As such, they downplay the historical use of vouchers as a tool for white segregationists to continue to resist the desegregation of schools (Gooden, Jabbar & Torres, 2016). However, it was Reagan who gave the voucher movement its greatest gift with the 1983 United States Department of Education's *A Nation at Risk* study. Using negatively charged words like "declining standards" and "school crisis," Reagan's harsh critique of public education ignited the driving force behind the voucher program which, for better or worse, continues today.

Both public and private schools are prohibited from discrimination through federal statutes such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 (Eckes et al., 2016). With the propagation of voucher programs, the exclusion of marginalized or disfavored groups has become far too common of a practice. Voucher program enrollment requirements vary, allowing schools to determine just how diverse and inclusive they want to be ("Private school," 2016).

How could choice be a bad thing?

While there are close to 7,000 voucher programs in 43 different states, public school enrollment is projected to increase by 5% and private schools will decrease by 4% between now and 2024 (Hussar & Bailey, 2016; Toppo, 2017; "Private school," 2016). Public school budgets are already strained enough without voucher programs divert more money (Dwyer, 2013; Eckes, Mead & Ulm, 2016; "Private School," 2016). Schools have a hard enough time funding core classes let alone offering high-quality humanities courses.

Blending education for the common good with the ability to decide what is "good" for all is a slippery slope. While some circles view vouchers as a success – especially a political one – they are often a civil rights failure (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley & Wang, 2010). Simply put, vouchers allow parents to use public education funds to select schools where their child's peers think, look, speak, and believe as they do, thus eroding the ability for schools to remain a place where students can learn not only about but from the microcultures that make up our society. Policymakers highlight the benefits but remain silent on how choice can result in a step back toward school segregation along racial, socioeconomic, gender, orientation, and religious line.

Race

Schools are set to be more diverse than ever before in the coming years (Hussar & Bailey, 2016). As inequality divides our society in a myriad of ways, school choice exacerbates this predicament by allowing parents to pick a school with the racial makeup of their liking.

The hope that academic achievement would be a primary motivator for parents is just that – a hope, not a reality (Gooden et al., 2016; Stein, 2015). Voucher schools in Indiana revealed parents often selected schools that reflect their own race and/or ethnicity (Stein, 2015). Two out of every three Black voucher school students attend an intensely segregated school across the country, while Latinx students are under-enrolled in voucher schools in western states, even though they make up a large percentage of the population (Frankenberg et al., 2016).

Socioeconomic Status

Voucher programs are often open to all students, allowing wealth and privilege to erode opportunities for those truly in need. Only 20% of Nevada's voucher students identify as low-income, while more than 30% live in the state's wealthiest zip codes (Millard, 2015).

Additionally, the maximum cost of the voucher may not cover the entire cost of tuition, books, and fees and are not located within lower-income neighborhoods, making them unrealistic options to those in poverty (Gooden et. al., 2016). Thus, paying for transportation to and from school, let alone even being aware of the school's existence is problematic (Fleming, Cowen Witte & Wolf, 2013).

Religion

Many private schools tend to be theologically driven, blurring the lines between using federal money to support a religious organization with vouchers. The American Civil Liberties Union has made this argument for years and filed lawsuits under this very notion.

Those who don't believe or practice the religion of the school might not feel welcomed or even be accepted in the first place (Fleming et. al., 2013). The United States Government Accountability Office found that religiously affiliated schools varied on how entrenched religion was a part of its admission and curriculum ("Private school," 2016). While one school may require students to follow specific religious principles upon admission, others might have religious components in their curriculum, but students of any faith are welcome to apply. So, while they claim to not discriminate, it begs the question of how comfortable a student would be attending a school so focused on a faith that he or she does not ascribe to.

Gender, Sex, and Exceptionalities

Public-school anti-discrimination language is not mirrored in most voucher programs, which, from both a policy and legal perspective, is unsettling. State voucher programs cite the anti-discrimination provision 42 of Title VI as their guide, yet it only provides protection for race and ethnicity, leaving the door open for disability, gender, or sexual orientation discrimination.

Students with special needs are often underrepresented in voucher programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

requires public school districts to provide for the students who are parentally placed in voucher school programs to ensure that special education and related services are consistent with public schools ("Private school," 2016). Yet districts only have to share IDEA funding with voucher students if the *state* moves them – parental choice doesn't have the same requirements, something parents are often unaware of ("Private school," 2016).

Additionally, several studies have found discrimination against LGBTQ students or those from LGBTQ families when trying to use educational vouchers to attend specific schools (Wagner, 2017). While gender and sexual orientation are protected under Title IX, there is no explicit protection for LGBTQ students within voucher program anti-discrimination laws in any state (Eckes et. al., 2016). Thus, the only recourse students have is the arduous process of filing a lawsuit under the 14th Amendment.

Need for same standards for voucher programs

If educational voucher programs continue to allow "choice" to be synonymous with "segregation," one can only wonder what the long-term effects will be. If vouchers are to become what their proponent claims, then they must ensure voucher programs are held to the same standards as public education, including:

- Incorporating school choice with integration goals including free transportation, and outreach to community members to ensure all students are given the same opportunity.
- Guaranteeing school transparency and installing safeguards to promote diversity and prevent isolation in terms of race, gender, income, religion, and sexual orientation.
- Comprehensive oversight to ensure an appropriate supply of services and an opportunity to manage the system to ensure accessibility and equitably that meets all the same rules as public education.

Conclusion

Education fractured into islands of sameness flies in the face of the idea of the free and open common school our nation welcomed over one hundred years ago and continues to promote today. Research on voucher programs "continues to be developing, complex, and far from conclusive" (Gooden et. al., 2016, p. 523).

The only way to create an education system that is equitable for all is through a joint effort between educational leaders and policymakers (Frankenburg et. al., 2010).

oversight to ensure access to quality education and that the education we provide our students prepares them for the diverse world that awaits them must be mandatory.

Many claim that education will be the civil rights issue of our time. If that is true, authentic

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When Mentoring Falls Apart:

Exploring the Complexities of Establishing Mutually Respectful Mentoring Relationships

Julianna E. Lopez Kershen, Ed.D.

Many school leaders and teachers believe mentoring relationships offer a ready remedy to the obstacles facing new teachers. However, mutually respectful and collaborative mentoring relationships do not develop automatically. To adequately support beginning teachers, it is helpful to examine examples illustrating when mentoring fails to meet its goals. Dysfunctional mentoring relationships exist, and these relationships can result in ineffectiveness and dissatisfaction in both mentor and mentee (Kershen, 2014; Straus, Johnson, Marquez, & Feldman, 2013; Hudson & Hudson, 2017). By looking closely at fragile relationships, teacher educators, school leaders, and policymakers gain a view into the intra/interpersonal and contextual elements that affect mentoring relationships.

English language arts educators often serve in mentoring roles for early career ELA, English learner, and humanities colleagues (Marsh & Goff, 2018; Jeffers, 2017; Lee, 2018). Our mentoring relationships can have broad effects on early career teachers. Importantly, mentoring within ELA may contain content-related challenges because skills and knowledge within our field are sometimes considered difficult to assess, while “the subjective nature of ELAR instruction and assessment leads to a greater freedom in the classroom, but it also fosters a more intense feeling of insecurity and stress for the teacher during instruction, lesson planning, and student-work evaluation” (Porter, 2018, p. 9). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has repositioned many experienced teachers as novices, and thus, teachers across experience levels share feelings of uncertainty around professional learning (Lopez, 2022).

In 2008 Hahs-Vaughn and Scherff reported findings indicating that nationally, almost half of English teachers self-identified as generally satisfied and believed their schools were positive workplaces. At that time, 40% of the English teachers reported being happy with their class sizes and believed they had the resources needed to teach (Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008). Juxtaposing these findings against the current Oklahoma context of 2022, would the findings still hold true? Before the challenges created by Covid-19, attrition and retention issues were already paramount in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma State Department of Education reported in 2019

that the number of educators leaving the profession had increased to more than 5,000 per year, culminating in 30,000, or an average of 10% of teachers, leaving since 2012 (Lazarte Alcalá, 2018/2019). In addition, while 82% of beginning teachers in Oklahoma continued to teach after one year, by year six only 53.9% remained. Furthermore, teachers with emergency certification had the lowest rates of retention, with only 73.6% teaching into their second year. Especially pertinent to the field of ELA, the study found that secondary core content-area teachers left the classroom at rates higher than the 10% state average. Taken together, it is clear that a close look at failed mentoring relationships can inform how we better support all teachers, and how ELA professionals can serve as teacher leaders (Palmer, 2018) and nurturing mentors (McCann & McClain, 2010) for their early career peers.

The teacher-participants in this study of mentoring taught across the PK-12 spectrum. The findings are applicable to English language arts teachers as opportunities to deepen professional conversations about how we support one another and strengthen the Oklahoma ELA teacher corps. Through inductive analysis of interviews with beginning year teacher mentees and their respective mentors this research uncovered three attributes that characterized dysfunctional mentoring relationships. This paper focuses on the attribute of pressure to assimilate and replicate the normative school culture, including pressure to closely conform to their mentors' modes of instructional practice.

Mentoring is most effective when both beginning teachers and mentors conceptualize their relationship in terms of student learning and learning to teach. Both members need to be willing to learn alongside a colleague (Little, 1990; Roehrig et al., 2008). This conceptualization of self and other as “learner” has been referred to as a “bifocal perspective” (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005). Utilizing this dual perspective, both mentor and mentee attend to the learning of their students and that of the adults in the mentoring relationship. Additionally, teachers' stance towards the act of teaching, as public or private, affects not only teaching effectiveness, but also mentoring effectiveness (Strong & Baron, 2004; Achinstein

& Barrett, 2004). The extent to which the mentor teacher is able to adopt and inculcate the required bifocal perspective will influence the success of the mentoring relationship. Likewise, how a beginning teacher views their role within the larger school culture and context weighs heavily on their ability to seek assistance within the mentoring relationship.

Mentoring is situated work (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002) and is negotiated within specific contexts. Sundli's (2007) research highlights the powerful effects of school culture on teacher beliefs, behavior, and relationships. Tacit aspects of school culture, which may be reinforced through teacher replication of school traditions and implicit adult norms of control and authority over students, will facilitate or constrain effective mentoring.

Considering that mentoring and induction efforts are hailed as an inoculation for beginning teachers against systemic and local challenges study of these efforts is imperative. As noted by Colley (2002), studies seeking to understand the negative effects of mentoring relationships are particularly lacking in the research literature. This study expands our understanding of failed mentoring relationships by investigating what attributes characterize mentoring relationships described as fragile and failing?

Methods

The participant data sample consisted of three mentor-mentee dyads (six participants) and derived from a larger data set of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations focused on a phenomenological, descriptive study of mentoring relationships and teacher practice. Participants were selected from a single school district in a Midwestern state.

The six participants described in this paper, mentors and beginning teacher mentees, worked in three different schools. All newly hired beginning year teachers were invited to participate at the district's summer New Teacher Orientation. Each of the mentors participated in one 60-90 minute semi-structured interview, mid-way through the school year. Beginning year teacher mentees participated in two 45-90 minute semi-structured interviews (November/May). All six of the teachers were asked to participate in classroom observations, however only four (one mentor and three mentees) consented to researcher observation. Two of the beginning teachers participated in multiple additional short observations with the researcher.

Inductive, grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of the data occurred in two overlapping phases. Throughout the analytic process the researcher relied on memo writing as a means of reflection and assessing quality. Ultimately the analytic process resulted in identification of attributes that characterized these relationships. The portrait of mentoring work described by participants revealed important structural, individual, and ideological weaknesses. This framework of fragility offered a way of understanding the guiding circuitry of the mentoring relationship, while honoring the nested realities of teaching life in schools.

Findings

Each of these troubled mentoring relationships was characterized by a collision between the goals and expectations of the partnering teachers. As a result, participants in these relationships reported dissatisfaction with mentoring. The words of participants illustrate the attributes understood to characterize their mentoring relationships and the attribute of assimilation pressure placed on mentees. Beginning teachers Beatrice, Allison, and Melanie¹ described how they navigated delicate mentor/mentee interactions within mentoring relationships providing limited emotional, institutional, or educative support. In short, these mentoring relationships exhibit diminished returns; the time spent by mentors and mentees in these relationships appears to have spurred limited gains of efficacy or confidence for the mentees, and very little inquiry into teaching practice.

Assimilation Pressure and Mentee Struggle to Assimilate

Assimilation pressure included descriptions of the ways in which mentees were expected to conform to the existing cultures of their schools, grade-levels, and subject-areas. Through a variety of implicit and explicit messages all three mentees learned that they should aim to replicate the mentor's teaching practices. Mentors communicated these messages of expectation, replication, compliance, and punishment to the mentees in many ways. For example, beginning teachers Melanie and Beatrice each reported that their planning meetings were less about collaborative planning and more about establishing a groupthink attitude towards using prewritten lesson plans.

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout to refer to participants in the study. This study was conducted with IRB approval.

These expectations of assimilation erupted in many forms of internal and external conflict for the beginning teachers.

Beginning year teacher Beatrice reported pressure to conform to the default culture of adult-child relationships centered on issues of control, coercion, and discipline. Beatrice ultimately chose to comply with the normative school culture, although she expressed her discomfort with it. Faculty at her school, including Beatrice's mentor, expected her to modify how she managed her students, and align her practices and beliefs with those shared in her school. Through conversations with colleagues, Beatrice understood that she might be more successful if she adopted others' views and practices. Thus, while Beatrice reported that she "didn't like to be a yeller," and actively sought out other ways to get her rambunctious first graders to pay attention in class, because she struggled with classroom management issues throughout the year, she often defaulted to the correctional methods suggested by her colleagues.

I've had to learn how to get meaner... I hate saying mean too, because it makes me feel terrible, but firmer. One of the resource teachers, I was talking to her, and I said, "you know, I feel like I'm constantly yelling at them." And she reminded me to think about the kind of homes that these kids come from. And so they're not necessarily used to hearing, "I really need you to stop." And that's just not going to phase them, and some of them, you have to get louder with. You don't have to, you know, growl at them or anything, but you have to be louder and firmer for them to actually respond to something. And so, I was like, "you know, it makes sense." I wish it wasn't true, but you know, trying to train them into hearing that "I need you to stop" has been hard...

In this example Beatrice exposed the conflict she felt between her beliefs about how she should relate to her students and the advice she received from colleagues about management of students. She shared that she had to "get meaner," and although she reported that the common practice of yelling made her "feel terrible," she justified yelling because others told her it was the best approach when recognizing, "the kind of homes that these kids come from." In this case Beatrice reconciled her discomfort, saying, "I wish it wasn't true." However, later in the year, it was clear that Beatrice had not fully assimilated into the norms of the school culture

and that she still struggled with not only classroom management, but how she perceived teachers and students should relate to one another.

I remember I was talking to another teacher... I was talking about how I don't like to be a yeller... but... they got a lot of yelling [in Kindergarten] and so weaning them off of that has been interesting, but I was at one point just kind of overwhelmed, like what do I do? How am I going to fix all of this? It was right around spring break and I was watching "Supernanny"... and I just said to myself, You know what? I've tried everything else. This is what I'm going to do... and I don't necessarily like putting kids in time out, I would rather have a conversation about what was wrong: Ok, what can we do to fix it? And actually fix it. But sometimes... we have a kid who's just being unsafe and you got to get them away from everyone else.

Beatrice's discomfort with what she perceived to be the normative culture at her school and her limited options for classroom management strategies stretched across the entire school year. She also explained that her mentor was too busy with her own "tough class," to offer much assistance. Mentor Nadine's advice to Beatrice at the time was, "sometimes you just have to try everything, and I may not be able to tell you what it is you need to do." This advice communicated a transactional, replication-preferred relationship, as well as the hierarchy of learning through experience. Arguably, the pressure to assimilate to the expectations of her colleagues and replicate the normative practices in her school, coupled with students already inducted into that culture, presented a challenge for Beatrice. HERE

Conforming to the default school culture also meant replicating the teaching methods of the mentor teacher without question. Allison, a new high school teacher, described her struggles with classroom management and student motivation. Allison spent the bulk of her teaching time with ninth grade students whom she found challenging. Allison explained that her mentor Astrid's actions encouraged her silence, to keep her struggles contained in her own classroom, and to rely upon replication as the main strategy for teaching and lesson planning. Allison also explained the power dynamic between them as shaping her confidence and ability to seek assistance. "She's also the head of the department... But I do kind of feel a lot of

pressure from her to do really well because I know she thinks that I'm doing well, but I kind of feel like if I ever make mistakes or do stuff wrong, or even just like have problems... I don't want to look like I'm incompetent, so I don't always go to her with stuff."

In the semester preceding Allison's first year she worked as a student teacher in Astrid's classroom. Allison expressed that she was expected to replicate Astrid's teaching style because she had observed it the year before. She explained, "I think the problem is that neither one of the other teachers in my department have written lesson plans... They've both been doing it for so long that they just know what they're doing in their head." She shared that although she had seen Astrid's methods in action with older students, Allison was ill-equipped to meet those standards in her current situation. For example, Allison described, "sometimes if I'll ask for something specific... I can get that specific thing if I come and find them. But not the general plan of what it's supposed to look like." Astrid expressed frustration that she did not receive assistance in how to think about and approach her work in more manageable ways.

Stories shared by Melanie's mentor teacher Bonnie were particularly potent in conveying the value placed on assimilating into the default culture of her school. Bonnie and beginning teacher Melanie worked within a culture that valued conforming to traditional hierarchy and roles. For example, Bonnie stressed that she was unable to observe Melanie teach because they were given no administrative support to be away from their own classrooms. She told me, "I would need a little bit more support from my principal... like maybe a substitute for half a day so I can observe... his answers have been, Well, when you go to the library then you can go watch her teach. But the librarian says you are supposed to stay with your class. It's like a catch 22." Bonnie further illustrated her principal's leadership style when she explained how she became a mentor:

Two summers ago I got an email from my principal saying that I was going to be attending a three day meeting. I was just told... And I didn't realize that I had an option... It wasn't, "who would like to do this?" I was just told. But I'm the type of person that when my principal tells me something then I do it, like I'm a rule follower, so I attended the meetings.

For these six teachers, lesson planning and mentoring meetings functioned as prime opportunities for mentors to reinforce compliance expectations while also disseminating prepared lessons, materials, and institutional information. For beginning teacher Melanie these meetings could more aptly be characterized as information dissemination sessions in which her mentor Bonnie delivered a prepared set of lesson plans to the team with limited discussion. Autonomy was not encouraged.

Melanie described these meetings as both a help and a hindrance to her practice. Melanie shared that the information gave her confidence by providing a "skeleton" of lesson plans; she explained, "I feel like having that groundwork every week, it just saves my life sometimes. So it's really been helpful to have a team to plan with." However, the meetings also established and reified a groupthink attitude towards using already written lesson plans and materials. In this way it was communicated that the knowledge of the mentor teacher was more valuable and useful than that of the mentee, contributing to a tenuous mentoring relationship.

Within the culture of Melanie's team it was accepted that Bonnie would write the lesson plans for all four, fourth grade teachers. Their weekly planning meeting was a time for Bonnie to disseminate the plans, explain the activities and materials, and answer questions. Bonnie explained the process and her expectations for Melanie in this way:

I typically have the plans already made, and I kinda give them the information... it's just easier that way... for Melanie that's just her listening time because she really, I mean, she knows that we do the next lesson in math, the next story in the reading book, like she knows that order of things, and she picks up on that, but as far as anything extra, that we are going to change this up, and we are going to do it this way, or when we finish this book we are going to do this project, you know, she's just all ears on how we are going to do things. I try to have everything already planned out... to make that go smoother. Then Thursday after school we run copies. We try to run all of our copies for the whole next week and that way they are already organized into Monday through Friday files... Melanie doesn't bring a lot to the table there because it's just all so brand new, you know, she's never taught any of those lessons before,

so she just does a lot of listening and writing down what we plan on doing.

Bonnie shared that once in a while she allowed others to participate in some “give and take” by letting her colleagues make limited choices. Melanie described this invitation to share her ideas, while also capitulating to Bonnie’s positions of power, prestige, and knowledge in the planning meetings.

In the second interview Melanie reflected on the successes and hardships of working within these meeting constraints. She described that the shared lesson plans did not always meet the needs of her students. She told me, “this team... plans everything together. If you walked through our rooms at 10:00, we would all be doing the same thing at the same time, within a fifteen-minute span... we are all doing the same thing, at the same time of day, in the same order, in the same way, and so that has been hard for me sometimes.” If she adjusted her teaching, and thus the lesson plans, Melanie had to decide if it was worth it to discuss those changes with Bonnie. Melanie learned that if Bonnie found out about Melanie’s changes in planning and teaching she would be angry. Melanie’s story below about modifications she made when teaching fractions exemplified the delicate balance she was forced to manage.

For example, we had this activity where we were going to put, we have fractions and decimals that we learned about and we wrote them all on index cards and they [students] had to make a line to put them in order from least to greatest, and I felt like my kids didn’t know it well enough yet... So I said, “I’m not going to do it Monday as a pre-assessment, because I know they can’t do it. I’m going to do it at the end of the week as a post-assessment and then if I feel like they don’t get it still, I’m going to throw it in like when I do guided reading as one of my centers and try to do other things to kind of like bring it up if I feel like a couple of kids still aren’t getting it.” And my mentor teacher found out that I hadn’t done it Monday, and she was genuinely mad at me, like genuinely, and I was like, “I’m doing it, I’m just doing it in a different order than you. I am still doing the same thing.” And she was not pleased about it... she was just like, “I don’t think you understood the point, I’m not happy about this.”

Melanie explained that she generally avoided discussing any changes with Bonnie so as to avoid discord within their relationship. Melanie justified her amendments to the shared lessons plans in two ways. First, she was motivated by a sense that her students “needed” different instructional presented. Second, she felt that some of the materials she was expected to use were inappropriate, boring, or outdated.

I want to be a little more flexible, I guess, when I am doing my own thing because I mean things change, and... they all have the same files of everything... Like my class is completely different from her class, and then my other teammates’ are completely different from that, and -- She has been teaching for eight years and we have been using largely the same things. Not all the same things, but probably I would say at least half, then... that was eight years ago... stuff changes... Like we are doing [state] history right now... it’s a whole book, and we are doing three or four lessons out of it. I mean, we are not going to get to the Tulsa race riots... anything that I would consider interesting. And that’s because everyone is supposed to be doing the same thing at the same time.

Despite the difficulties of planning within the constraints of the school culture, Melanie internalized the functioning of the planning meetings with her team as a framework for making sense of her mentoring relationship and also the kind of experience a first year teacher should expect to have. She shared that she felt, “I was in the right place for my first year because it gave me something to lean on throughout the whole year, but next year I am ready to start making some more of my own decisions.” Melanie’s conclusion here indicated that she chalked her experience up as typical for a beginning teacher.

In summary, expectations of assimilation can weaken mentoring relationships. Beginning teachers Allison and Beatrice reported that their mentors implicitly communicated expectations that their beginning teacher mentees replicate instructional and management practices and attitudes. For Melanie, the expectation to replicate the practices of her mentor Bonnie was more explicit and included interactions marked by struggles of compliance and punishment.

Discussion

Beginning year teachers Allison, Beatrice, and Melanie described mentoring relationships that were sometimes negligent, sometimes hurtful, and sometimes helpful. It was clear that these mentor teachers were unprepared to enter into and guide mutually respectful and collaborative relationships focused on educative mentoring and learning to teach. It was also clear that the limited school district structure, support, and oversight for these dyads was inadequate. In the vacuum created by the expectation that mentoring should occur and the absence of support and supervision, these dyads failed to engage in productive conversations about teaching or develop the bifocal perspective needed to engage in effective mentoring.

The focus on assimilation described by participants indicated that mentors in this study unwittingly reinforced a limited view of mentoring through their use of shared planning time. When planning meetings operate as forums for the mentor teacher to directly transmit information to the mentee teacher and perhaps other teachers in their grade level team, it truncated teacher learning in multiple ways. When shared lesson planning time was limited to the delivery of information, it reified the message that teaching was a fixed process. Additionally, this framing by the mentor implicitly communicated that teaching and learning to teach were not developmental processes. Thus, beginning teachers entered and were acculturated into school cultures that positioned teachers to be passive delivery systems of prepackaged curricula, materials, and programs, and these conditions further reiterated the issues of value and epistemology previously mentioned.

In these ways, beginning teachers were denied the opportunity to understand how more experienced teachers make instructional decisions. Because the lessons were already prepared, and often delivered with finality, the meetings held little space for mentees to inquire into the construction of the lessons. Likewise, the construction of lesson planning did not promote intentionality in the teaching of the mentee. Though the lessons may have been carefully constructed by the mentor teacher to meet the needs of their students, lacking a conversation about thinking and rationale behind the planning, the beginning teachers did not understand the intentional nature of the act of lesson planning. Indeed, given the current policy and practice emphasis on designing differentiated instruction that is responsive to strengths and needs of particular students,

shared planning time could be constructed as an opportunity for beginning teachers to see into the metacognitive thinking of more expert colleagues. When used in this way, planning time can also be a chance for beginning teachers to explain their own thinking and planning, and becomes a forum of idea sharing and shared analysis of data that can then be used to inform lesson design.

The findings of this study also highlight the need for adults in mentoring relationships to explicitly identify themselves and others as active learners. Mentoring needs explicit attention to self-reflection through metacognitive awareness about one's teaching and ongoing learning to teach. Both mentors and mentees benefit when they develop ways of talking about their own learning (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010) and are better equipped to convey the micro-processes involved in often taken-for-granted teaching decisions (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010; Roehrig, et al., 2008; Stanulis & Brondyk, 2013).

The findings reported here vividly illustrate how a loosely-coupled induction program allowed mentoring dyads to focus on “address[ing] immediate problems without promoting teacher development.” Within the field of English language arts, encouraging reflective practice is an important element of professional growth. Just as readers engage in metacognitive conversations with texts, so too, must ELA teachers engage in metacognitive reflection and self-study of instructional practice. Research into ELA educators who utilize reflective practices has found that those teachers, “positioned themselves as active readers and meaning-makers who explored their practices... studied the tensions they experienced like “texts” from which they discovered new understandings; and utilized content-area knowledge, strategies, skills, and contexts to frame, guide, or inform their self-study” (Edge & Olan, 2020, p. 779). Mentoring relationships can, and should, be fertile ground for early career teachers to learn how to learn about teaching.

Conclusion

The stories from these teachers offer an intimate view into how mentoring can fail. Mentoring relationships are inadequate when mentors focus on assimilation, model a short-term perspective, and fail to frame the relationship around learning how to teach. The implicit and explicit messages communicated by the mentor to the mentee shape how a beginning teacher comes to understand and define their work, reinforcing the attitudes of conservatism and

presentism that permeate schools (Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Furthermore, as these relationships fail to meet their needs, mentees may experience acute feelings of isolation in the face of what feels like an overwhelming workload. When mentoring is reduced to the dispensing of quick fixes the opportunity to support the developing expertise of both the beginning teacher and the mentor are lost.

In her prescient 1990 critique of mentoring Little recognizes and describes the problems of institutionalizing mentoring as a primary means of socializing and professional developing instructional expertise in teachers. Dilemmas of mentoring emerge within and between individuals as they move between the roles and the conditions of teaching (Little, 1990). One such dilemma, that mentoring requires mentors to leave their own students and teaching and attend to the learning in other classrooms clearly existed within the mentoring relationships in this study. All three mentors found it difficult to sacrifice time with their students to observe in their mentees' classrooms, even though it was a programmatic expectation. Little's (1990) research recognized that by using teacher-teacher mentoring as the main mechanism for teacher learning places

“teachers’ work with fellow teachers in competition with the fundamental work of the classroom,” and that “to fulfill the obligations of mentoring, mentors risk compromising other valued institutional goals and increasing the strain on themselves” (p. 311).

Mentoring relationships provide a lifeline for many beginning teachers, and did for most the teachers in the larger study containing this data (Kershen, 2014). Entrance and induction into the teaching profession is difficult, as the stories of these beginning year teachers attest. Mentoring of a peer is also difficult and complex work, too often left in a borderland where individuals must make their own rules about how to proceed and what to emphasize. Institutionalized mentoring, as it stands, often places the burden of teacher learning and the improvement of our profession on the backs of teachers. It is my hope that these findings contribute to the larger and urgent discussion that teacher learning, across all grade levels and content areas, must be accelerated, rewarded, and institutionalized. This is especially true for beginning teachers -- as they now make up the bulk of our teaching force.

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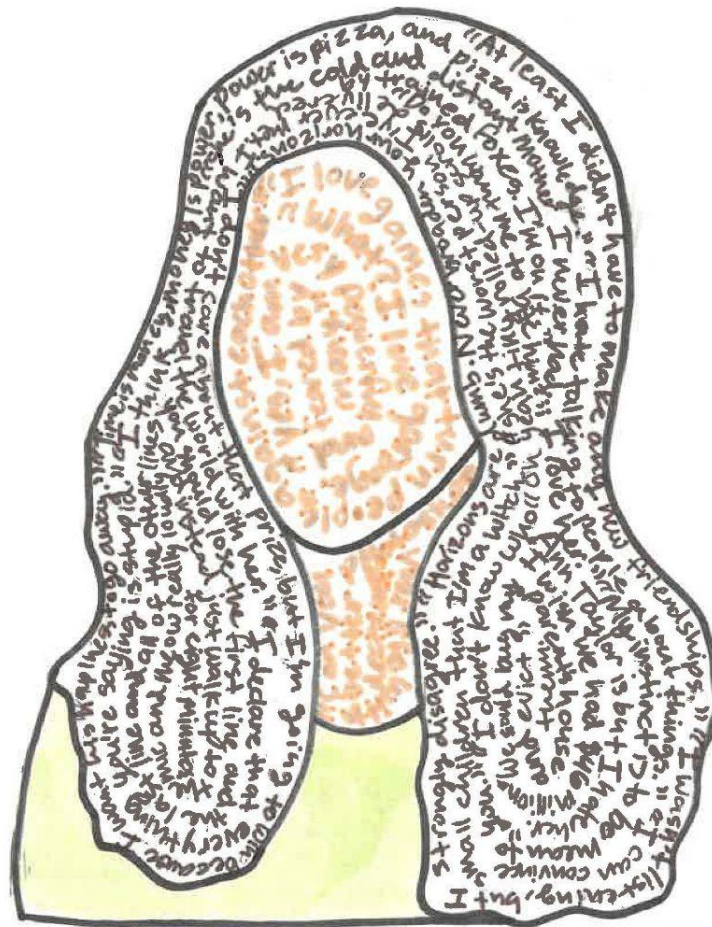
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Concrete Poem 2 (Student Poetry)

Alina Selliman



Alina Selliman is an eighth-grader at Cheyenne Middle School in Edmond, Oklahoma. Her teacher Jordan Hopper is an Oklahoma Writing Project teacher consultant.

How's This Stuff Gonna Help Me?

Timothy Black

One of the most common statements I hear as a teacher is, “How is this going to help us in life?” As an English teacher, I sometimes hear “We’ll never use algebra,” and I’m sure when the students go down the hall to math they’ll say, “Why do we study literature? That won’t help us in life.” Of course, I’m not remotely qualified to discuss the algebra question, so let’s focus on what I know and love best: English class, and specifically, literature.

The gutsy and brave kid does have the courage to ask how we are going to use literature in life, and frankly, it’s one of my favorite questions to answer (my least favorites are things like “Why can’t we eat food in class that the school sells?” Or “Why can’t we wear hats in the building?”).

To start, I think one of the greatest talents and goals of any author is to write a story that we can see ourselves in, or that we can see someone we know. And from that, we learn about ourselves and we see how fictional characters (who in my view are almost always based on someone) solve problems or don’t solve problems, and we are able to apply that to our own lives.

In English I, we read James Hurst’s classic short story, “The Scarlet Ibis,” and the students react in horror knowing that the narrator has hatred for his little brother, Doodle, who has a disability. But when we examine ourselves, we know that most of us have had similar thoughts about siblings, and the students say especially younger siblings. It shows the human side of the narrator, which sometimes is not so pretty. Nor is the narrator’s motivation for teaching Doodle to walk, noting that it was for his own pride that he did it and said he was a “slave” to pride. He also called pride a “seed that bears two vines, life and death,” and students reading the story see how it is one thing to take pride in being responsible and polite, but there is a negative kind of pride where we accomplish feats for our own glory and not for the good of others.

Not only is “The Scarlet Ibis” a lesson in human psychology, but the seniors who read *The Tragedy of Macbeth* experience much of the same learning. Shakespeare captures the protagonist’s psychological wrestling match which harbors the proverbial devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other. We must understand the allegorical nature of the story, otherwise, it becomes a useless bloodbath, and

we must learn that we have a choice to listen to the “angel” and not to take matters into our own hands and run over anyone and everyone in the process. Furthermore, Shakespeare warns of the impending doom of Macbeth in the very title itself, and we learn that he was responsible for his own undoing. Students can benefit by reflecting on their own lives and learning to steer clear of any temptation that takes them off the proper path.

In *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, I stress that the story is actually called “The Tragedy of” for a reason although it is usually stylized as just “Romeo and Juliet.” There is purpose in the title, and I tell the students it has already slapped us in the face with foreshadowing the horrible, untimely, brought-on-themselves deaths of the stars of the show because that’s what a “tragedy” does. We learn that the “star-crossed lovers” don’t randomly die at the end because of one event, rather it is a series of choices that undo them—much like in the biblical account of Samson—hence the title “tragedy.” Before Act I, Scene i ends, we see how Romeo himself is gripped with sadness and moodiness and “private in his chamber pens himself, shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out.” A huge part of the tragedy lies in that Romeo never takes steps to help his own mental state and believes that only the love of Juliet will fix everything. He jumps from a previous relationship quickly into the one with Juliet, and upon their first, sudden kiss, Juliet playfully refers to it as a “sin,” something that more than likely would have been taboo in their religious culture. It is “little foxes that spoil the vine” to borrow a biblical term, and the runaway train is picking up steam to the final tragic deaths. From this, we can learn that the story is not the ultimate love story because in the greatest of love stories we know that—as cliché as it is—the lovers do live happily ever after.

Another great English I story is the *Odyssey*, one that shows perseverance, loyalty, and bravery. Students learn that real heroes display courage in leadership and are willing to set an example for the troops. We also see the strength that both Odysseus and Penelope display in their fidelity for one another, despite being apart for twenty years. Through that, students learn that they can lead a solid, moral life. And we see that success may come from a journey; life is not about sprints but about a marathon, something

that the protagonist shows us in this classic work.

When students ask those questions of how it will help them, I start out by saying, tongue-in-cheek, “You will never get a job because you’ve read the *Odyssey*, but you will learn life lessons which in turn can help you be a better citizen and person in general.” And not only that, when you

read and are able to draw inferences and dive deep, you are critically thinking, something vital in education these days. Plus, reading and comprehending a difficult text will certainly make it easier to read a job application. For these reasons, I am fully convinced that literature is one of the most vital things that we study in school.

Timothy Black is a High School English and Creative Writing Teacher at Verden Public Schools.



Under the Survivor Tree Canopy (Photo credit: Michelle Boyd Waters, 2022)

Concrete Poem 3 (Student Poetry)

Olivia Newberry



Olivia Newberry is an eighth grader at Cheyenne Middle School in Edmond, Oklahoma. Her teacher Jordan Hopper is an Oklahoma Writing Project teacher consultant.

Book Review: *The Blackbird Girls*

Eril B. Hughes

Recommendation for *The Blackbird Girls* by Anne Blankman. New York: Viking Press, 2020. 334 pages.
2020 National Jewish Book Award for Middle Grade Literature winner. This novel is also appropriate for adult readers.

Three girls' lives are changed forever in two narratives that are almost forty-five years apart in *The Blackbird Girls*. The first narrative from April of 1986 begins with a chilling nuclear explosion that affects two of these three girls, Valentina and Oksana, two fifth-grade classmates in their school in Pripjat, Ukraine. The just-as-interesting secondary narrative focuses on the third girl, 12-year-old Rifka, as she flees in 1941 from the approaching Germans army that is getting close to her home in Kiev.

One important factor in these two narratives is that Valentina and Rifka are from the Jewish heritage, and their fictional existence represents the real-life lack of power of marginalized people in this time period. Valentina's mother can't teach in the public schools because of her Jewish heritage, and Valentina can't join the Young Pioneers because "Jews weren't welcome" (14). A classmate calls Valentina a "cheating Jew" after Valentina wins a fiercely competitive footrace at school against Oksana, and the Valentina's father could get a "black mark" at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant if Valentina gets into a fight at school (11-12). Oksana is amazed by the kindness of Valentina's family as they help her after her mother has to be hospitalized with radiation sickness. She remembers vividly the contrasting view that her father has told her on so many occasions: "Jews are liars" and "[t]hey're always watching you, trying to find a way to steal your job away or take your place" (9). The more she is around Valentina and her family, the more she wonders about the truth of what her father told her. This novel also mentions "how much the Germans hated Jews," but there is no mention of the concentration camps (43).

Unforgettable scenes abound in both narratives. One of the most memorable plot elements shows Rifka and her mother carefully hiding the family's Shabbat candlestick. Another shows Oksana running wildly after the ambulance that is taking her beloved mother to the hospital because of her high radiation level. Yet another occurs when Nathan, Rifka's cousin, is forced to work on a farm when he is helping Rifka evade the German army. The problem is that he never comes back into the action of the novel again. Is Nathan's "disappearance" poor plotting? Or is it a fact of life during wartime?

Connections between plots are also important structural elements in this novel: Journeys to safety are particularly prominent plot elements. Rifka's mother with her new baby boy decides to stay in Kiev while sending her daughter out of the city with her cousin to safety. (Nathan wants to go to one of the "Stans" (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, or Tajikistan.) Valentina's mother sends her daughter and Oksana to Leningrad to live with Valentina's grandmother.

This book has one important factor in its favor: It has the one key plot ingredient that always keeps a story from falling flat: the ability to sustain more than just one believable plot twist. The first big twist occurs after the Chernobyl reactor explosion, when Oksana thinks that her father is in the hospital. However, after she and her mother arrive at the hospital, her mother suddenly admits to Oksana that her father is actually presumed dead after being buried by the reactor debris. In another twist, Oksana's mother cannot join her daughter in the evacuation from Pripjat because she has a high radiation reading. Valentina's mother is also involved in a sudden twist when she spontaneously decides to include Oksana as part of her family as they leave Pripjat to find safety. The biggest twist of all will remain a secret in this recommendation. After all, readers deserve one big surprise.

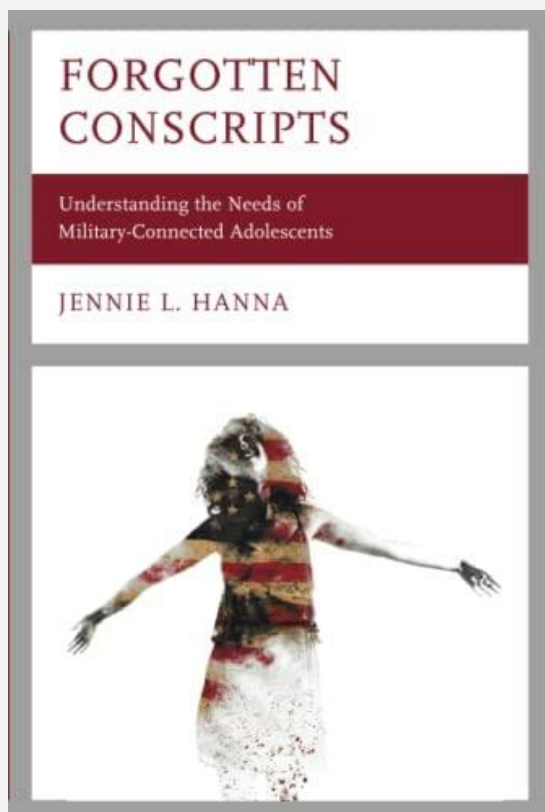
Beautiful descriptions and imagery occur at unusual points in both narratives. The book begins and ends with mentions of the blackbirds to support the book title. The blackbirds, along with all of the other birds, weren't waiting on the window sill for their salami at Valentina's house before Valentina learns about the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on page one, and the last lines of the book describe a special "drawing of two blackbirds soaring through the sky, the feathers of their outstretched wing touching like a pair of hands," creating an especially appropriate ending to the book (333). Even the tragedy in the first few pages of this novel contains beauty in its descriptions of the dramatic crimson clouds and the "unearthly blue" smoke over the burning Chernobyl nuclear power plant (1-2), and the quite different description of the Summer Gardens in Leningrad is marvelous (137-141).

This exceptional book also makes it easy to get attached to the three main characters, and the writing style alone makes this novel well worth the read! The best part of the book is the ending. Suffice it to say, there is joy and hope to balance the somber and chilling parts of this book. The fact that these characters are inspired by people who experienced these events makes this outstanding novel particularly special.

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Dr. Eril Hughes, an avid admirer of the creativity to be found in YA literature, teaches in the Department of English and Languages at East Central University in Ada, OK.



Forgotten Conscripts: Understanding the Needs of Military-Connected Adolescents
By Jennie L. Hanna.

Oklahoma's own Dr. Jennie L. Hanna has published her book on the topic of military-connected adolescents. The work is based on her dissertation.

Dr. Hanna has taught secondary and collegiate English in Lawton, Oklahoma, for 12 years. She has been a member of OKCTE since 2015.

Her research focuses on secondary ELA, military-connected adolescents, marginalized populations in education, and teacher-student relationships.

Untying Gordian's Knot:

Finding the balance between the intellect and the metaphysical in Literature

Deanna Braggs

Books have mesmerized me for as long as I can remember. When I was little, I thought everyone could see words bouncing off the pages as they read. As I got older, I could envision the author's patterns of thought, and not once did I consider that strange. I loved the stories that filled my head with fantasy worlds and magnificent heroes, but at the same time, I was fascinated by the rhythmic configurations on which those stories were built. I would watch as the world passed by, outwardly silent, but inwardly I was always questioning, "Who are these strange humans and why do they act the way they do?" I consumed book after book until I had read every text in the children's section of the library. By the end of my third-grade year, I had started on the adult section. I can honestly say, this is not the way my students feel about written literature today.

I am repeatedly being asked why it is necessary for anyone to read books, especially old-outdated ones. In fact, they believe that books themselves will no longer be practical in the future, they can just use a chrome book or iPad. As an English teacher this is very disheartening to hear and even harder to find ways to engage my students. I am not an English cannon promoter. I love historical fictions from any culture, and I am not against new books being added as our journey continues to unfold. Yet, from my experience there is much more to reading a book than getting a good grade on a test. Reading a good book is like taking a stroll down the pathways of an author's mind. We get a glimpse into a time or place we will never physically experience. Whether it be a fiction or non-fiction, we are forever changed, for better or worse, into time travelers.

One of my all-time favorite books, *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, has pages that are brittle and yellowed by time and use. The pages are marked up with annotations, ideas, and references to other literary works. I have read it repeatedly throughout my life. On page fifteen, my younger self left a note to Graves. It reads, "Thank you Robert Graves for describing who I am in describing yourself. You have enlightened me." The book was first published in 1948. Graves argues, "All true poetry is an invocation of the Goddess muse." This long essay resonated with me to my very core. It originated from the mind of a scientific intellectual with the heart of a poet. It is rare to find an author that

writes from both sides of the brain. I have found only two other authors in my life with the same perspective, C.S. Lewis, and Robin Wall Kimmerer. I cherish their books like gold and silver, because I am both a scientist and an artist.

I am sitting here drinking my coffee, on a cold winter day with the books I love sitting in front of me. They are beacons of hope in a world that has grown weary of education, and especially literature. With the almighty screens of all sizes ruling the world, one could get lost in the hopelessness that the Goddess must have felt when Alexander sliced through Gordian's knot: The knot that could not be untied by human hands. At that specific time in history, kings were born, not made, yet the Goddess chose a peasant man. He was an ordinary man, who drove his oxcart in to town, completely unaware, and was gifted a seat on the throne by the Goddess. This man's name was Gordias. In honor of the Gods for his newfound position and power, he tied his cart to the temple pillar. Ironically, he alone could not have tied the knot without the power of the goddess. This knot became a symbol of something greater than oneself. It reminded kings that they were not all powerful and their positions were indeed gifts and not rights. The knot was a symbol that fate was real, and that life had meaning and purpose. Just as poetry was the language of the goddess, the knot symbolized the power of the metaphysical realm.

Alexander the Great was a Greek with great ambition, he had grown up as a student of Aristotle the Philosopher. From the time of Socrates, poetry had been perceived as whimsical language that only women and children would engage in. The myths of the past were nothing, but bedtime stories and murals carved onto walls for entertainment. The intellect had removed all need for the metaphysical: Prose replaced poetry, the linear storyline usurped the circular, and patriarchy trumped the old regime. The oracle had prophesized that the man, who could untie the knot would rule most of the East. That fateful day, Alexander with his sword waged war, not on the East, but on the Goddess. Some literary critics believe that he did the impossible, he thought outside the box, his intellect allowed him to conquer the obstacle and remove the knot: He was the one prophesied by the oracle to conquer the East.

Yet, this is the interpretation of one, who perceives the world from only one hemisphere of their brain. Alexander used the situation to his advantaged to gain an emotional victory over the minds of those around him. Alexander the Great did not fulfill the prophecy: He did not untie the knot. He looked the Goddess in the eye, swung his sword, and proved to the world that the powerful elite did not have to bow to a goddess.

The stories of the past hold the foundation of our present and determine the path of our future. They are not merely there for our entertainment. Just like *The White Goddess* and Robert Graves enlightened and inspired me as a young woman, other books have inspired others. Stories are read to children to teach them social emotional learning, character building, and basic life lessons. We find ourselves in the characters that we read about, and we experience life choices without needing to face the consequences ourselves. Stories are like snapshots of lives lived, different perspectives, and places we will never see in real life. The human experience is wrapped up in stories, and we each play a part in the great epic of human history. Literature connects us to our ancestors letting us in on where and who we came from; it holds a mirror up in front of our face, so that we can see who we are; and it helps us imagine different futures that could materialize depending on our choices today. Literature is woven into our identity as human beings, not race or nationality, but Homo Sapiens. It sets the stage for our performance and gives us a reason to build a better world for tomorrow.

The Goddess represents the metaphysical realm of fantasy and spirituality. Truth was veiled in mystery and spoken beautifully in the guise of poetry. The knot was a symbol of human fragility and dependence on the forces of nature. Alexander, the ultimate representative of the intellect and human power dispelled the myth and with it, the hope of a power greater than us – humans became the usurpers of the world.

Books are beacons of light/hope, because within the diversity of their patterns of thought they provide a variety of ideologies. Books have been burned at different times in history, banned in other periods. Why? They hold conflicting and biased thoughts that feed us a balanced perspective of life and the world. It is easy for the elite of any nation to manipulate and control the hearts and minds of the uneducated. It is easy to force conformity to an ideology, a form of government, or change the economic preference of the society without access to ideas outside the status quo. The intellect without the emotion is harsh and unyielding, the emotion without the intellect is ungrounded and unstable. Duality is a must for reaching a state of homeostasis. The knot is a symbol of human fragility and interdependence of the forces of Nature. Alexander seized the right to rule the natural world.

Today, literary courses cannot compete with the drive for the intellectual subjects of math and science. One cannot make a ton of money from studying the past. However, innovation resides in the creative mind, the one that dances with the goddess and believes in Gordian Knots. Critical thinking requires a creative mind that can turn things around and look at it from different vantage points. Today, we see the philosopher like the Greeks saw the poet. The perception is that the past is rudimentary and holds no value. A beacon is a signal, often utilized as a symbol of inspiration and encouragement. These beacons have been used as both guiding lights and warnings. Like handwriting on the wall, they caution us to reconsider our actions before it's too late. As instructors of language and literature, we must light a flame in the darkness and we must show our students the value of knowing the past through our collective stories, and we must warn the Alexanders of our world that cutting the knot is not the same as untying it.

References

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Deanna Braggs has been teaching professionally for nine years. This is her third year with Tulsa Public Schools. She currently teaches 9-11th grade English at North Star Academy, which is an alternative high school, and is working on her second master's degree in Administration and Special Education. She loves nature and traveling, and every Friday, takes a group of students out to explore the urban wilderness. They have explored Flatrock creek and walked miles on the trail near their school.



National Council of
Teachers of English

NCTE: Remaining in Solidarity with Teachers Statement

[Read the full statement here.](#)

We see teachers. We honor teachers. We respect teachers. We recognize the full humanity of teachers and affirm their unwavering commitment to students, families, and communities. In fact, we are fully aware that every single day, teachers are engaging in important, necessary, and hard work, often under hostile conditions and within dehumanizing environments that increasingly question their commitments, their expertise, and their teaching

NCTE: NCAC Leads Coalition on the Attack of Books in School

[Read the full statement here.](#)

In communities across the country, an organized political attack on books in schools threatens the education of America's children. These ongoing attempts to purge schools of books represent a partisan political battle fought in school board meetings and state legislatures. The undersigned organizations and individuals are deeply concerned about this sudden rise in censorship and its impact on education, the rights of students, and freedom of expression.

Lava vs. Poison

Chloe Watson

Once upon a time, there were two tribes of dragons, the poison dragons and the lava dragons. The poison dragons' tribe name is the Igloos. The lava dragons' tribe name is the Flaming Logs. The Igloos live inside of a cave on the side of a snowy mountain. The Flaming Logs live in an underground lava cave in Africa.

Hunter is the leader of the poison dragons. He has two heads and is green with spikes on his back. He is a good swimmer. Hunter is also a father to four baby poison dragons. The babies' names are Rose, Flower, Fell, and Flash. Hunter's mate is named Star.

Rose is a red baby poison dragon with green spots. Flower is a baby blue poison dragon with white spots. Fell is a green and red poison dragon. Flash is a red and yellow poison dragon that is very fast. Star is named Star because she has a blue star marking on her head. Star is a gray poison dragon that has two scratches that go across her eye. She loves swimming in lava and water.

Collie is the leader of the lava dragons. He is very brave, big, and has gray spikes on his back. Collie loves hunting and fishing for animals that live in the lava. He also enjoys swimming in the lava. Collie has three babies. The baby lava dragons are named Kite, Saw, and Water.

On one sunny morning, the lava dragons were hunting zebras, but they didn't know that they were hunting in the poison dragon's territory. Meanwhile, the poison dragons were watching their kids play in the snow when they saw the lava dragons in their territory. When the lava dragons were done hunting, they decided to swim in the lava. Then, they heard a big ROAR!! The lava dragons all looked out of the lava.

IT WAS THE POISON DRAGONS!

All of the poison dragons followed Hunter, except for the kids. Then, the poison dragons started a fight. Collie told the lava dragons to dive and hide under the lava. But the poison dragons were lava proof. So the poison dragons followed the lava dragons into the lava. They swam behind a rock under the lava. The lava dragons had no choice, they had to fight! But they were too weak. Therefore, the poison dragons won.

The lava dragons asked the poison dragons why they attacked them. The poison dragons told them that they were hunting in their territory. The lava dragons said that they didn't know, so the poison dragons forgave the lava dragons. The lava dragons and the poison dragons became friends but will remain in their own territories.



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There Are Many Ways to Learn

Jordan Hopper

Read

Visualize the words on the page
Until they become part of you
Your brain is forever changed by
Their impact on your mind

Read

Feel the feelings purposefully portrayed
Connect with the cunning characters
Their thoughts, actions, and musings
Creating friends and enemies in your space

Read

Question the author's purpose
Understand how to grow
Like a rose from concrete
How to change your perspective or position

Read

Escape mundane reality to visit faraway lands
Expertly explore worlds that only exist in an
Author's brave and extraordinary imagination
Until now

Write

Until you can see
Your dreams come to life
On the paper that will
No longer weigh you down

Write

The courageous words that come from
Your brain, your heart, your hands
Fill the lines and take risks
Keeping the fear of failure at bay

Write

To teach others how to be fearless
Show them how to grow friendly with
Words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages
Reveal your soul and open your heart

Write

Even when you are afraid of being found out
Especially when you feel like a fraud
Or feel heartbroken, or alone, or alive
Continue to tell your story

Listen

Hear the voices that come before you
Understand their strife
Know their significant stories
Avoid heartbreaking history repeating itself

Listen

Absorb information like a sponge
Seeking to observe possibilities in prose
To grow your capabilities
Knowledge becomes what your soul seeks

Listen

Create spaces for others to speak
Wide-open spaces of persistent presence
Empathizing with the sounds of sorrow
As you take in melodious melancholy

Listen

Accept the joyfully shared words of
Goals reached and problems solved
Acknowledging the power of a trained ear
Not to purely hear but understand fellow man

Speak

When you can see that something isn't right
Raise up your voice to be
Loud above the roaring crowd
To take a stand for those who can't

Speak

Even when your heart is in your throat
Terrified of the consequences you might face
Let your words lead another
To a truth that demands to be shared

Speak

Freely share your praise
To positively impact the lives of others
Those who need a pep talk
Who need to know there's light in the dark

Speak

Put your mind on display
To change the future
To keep them from saying
It's always been done like this

Jordan Hopper is an eighth-grade English teacher at Cheyenne Middle School in Edmond, Oklahoma, and is in her seventh year of teaching. She encourages her young authors to share their stories because their voices matter. She is an Oklahoma Writing Project teacher consultant and currently pursuing her National Board Certification.