

NOTES ON AMERICAN LETTERS



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“Literature ranges from simple songs and sayings to elaborate and extended tales of human deeds. The most compelling literature concerns persons whose feelings, thoughts, and actions engage us in the lived time of mortality. Ideas and abstractions, which systematically separate themselves from persons and from time, do not form the essence of literature and do not surpass it.”

–Roger Shattuck, *Candor and Perversion*

EDITOR'S CORNER

This last Notes On American Letters issue of 2017 announces two important structural changes that deepen our commitment to an ever wider circle of editorial voices adding to those who now engage our readers.

We will add to our five present columns one devoted to new and highly appealing research ideas/findings that support stronger and more effective teaching. Findings from four highly respected educational journals will be presented in two of our quarterly issues. I encourage that our readers recommend particular issues they believe are worth reviewing in our coming issues; we want to fulfill your reach into this area that can be forbidding but can be a powerful tool for effective teachers.

Our second editorial addition will be a team of eight thoughtful and wide-ranging readers who will develop controversial Posts on a range of engaging topics. The long term commitment of these creators of Posts will increase the range of their topics and give them the longer time of search and incubation.

Chris Sabolcik, who is our current leader in this area, has been a devoted and dynamic Editor of this important feature of NAL. This was particularly true of the template we used to guide our contributors and increase their usefulness in propelling classroom discussions.

I hope these new dimensions of NAL will add to its luster.

*Joe Milner
Editor*

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**A MOST IMPORTANT GRAPHIC ORGANIZER: UTILIZING
AND ADAPTING KYLENE BEERS' MOST IMPORTANT
WORD GRAPHIC ORGANIZER FOR ALL LEARNING LEVELS**
Heather Barto Wiley

In 2002, Kyleene Beers published a book called *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6–12* (Heinemann 2002). Several years ago I discovered this text and found that its pragmatic and straightforward approach to building stronger middle and high school readers, changed the way I taught: Beers' simple yet impactful lessons gave me the self-assurance and tools I needed to tackle teaching my high school students who were struggling readers or non-readers to comprehend and analyze a text with confidence.

The most useful tool in the text is the Most Important Word graphic organizer which consists of a table of six sections aligned in a 2x3 chart that introduces developing readers to analysis. Students are given a text, and after reading it they first complete the middle of three boxes on the first row which asks them to fill in the blank for the following statement: "The most important word in this selection is _____." This box is surrounded by boxes that say "characters," "conflict," "plot," "setting," and "theme" and under these terms students write what the most important word reveals about each device. For example, a developing reader might write "Scout" under "characters" because she is the character most clearly connected to the most important word, and under "conflict" the student might write "man vs. man" or "Scout vs. Bob Ewell." This tool allows students to explore the relationship between diction and its impact on the work as a whole while "seeing" the interconnectedness between and among the devices surrounding the Most Important Word box.

Using the organizer evinces multiple ELA standards addressing word meaning in context, taking a position and proving it with textual evidence, using textual evidence to support inference, and determining a theme. It is so versatile that it can be adapted for use with fiction texts (both prose and poetry), nonfiction texts, and even with non-print images like a photograph or a painting. In the same way, I have found it useful for pre-assessing, monitoring, and formatively assessing student understanding.

I first used the organizer with my English I, standard class and realized how efficient and easily adaptable it was for use in any level of my English Language Arts (ELA) classroom: now, instead of writing only the literary terms around the Most Important Word box, I craft analytical questions: these questions are the key to differentiating the organizer as the level of the questioning is critical for leading pairs toward basic or deeper analysis of the text. For example, under the character section, I ask, for basic analysis, "What characters are connected to this word, and how do you know?" whereas for students with a deeper understanding of analysis, I pose the question "What aspect of the character does the diction illuminate?" I pair this adapted version of the organizer with a text that is short yet impactful in its diction: James Wright's poem "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" which details the cycles of love and self-destruction between fathers and sons. This text is short enough for students to feel successful, but it still requires them to work through difficult concepts and make inferences in order to successfully choose a most important word.

Upon receiving the poem, the pairs take fifteen minutes to complete the following activities before I distribute the graphic organizer: (1) partners alternate in reading the poem aloud to one another and mark anything interesting or confusing, (2) they identify characters, setting, conflict, the speaker, and the mood of the poem, and (3) craft two questions about the text. I have them pause at this point for a whole-class discussion where each group shares one interesting thought, question, or clarification from their paired discussion. As we explore the text together, I explicate their findings and elaborate upon their comprehension: a group might mention that the setting is Martin's Ferry, Ohio, and I might then introduce blue collar work and the culture of steel mill towns by looking at the specific images connected with the towns of "Wheeling Steel," "Tiltonsville," and "Benwood." Pausing at this point for a whole-group discussion orients the students to the poem and provides them

with a basic comprehension before they analyze the text with the graphic organizer.

Moving back into partner work, the students begin filling out the Most Important Word graphic organizer once they've read the poem aloud twice more and determined, together, the most important word or two-word phrase. I am adamant that both partners agree on the word or phrase because it naturally lends itself to a debate where students subconsciously prove their opinions using textual evidence. Sometimes pairs come to a stalemate and simply cannot agree, so I let them disagree with the understanding that at the end of the class they each need to prepare their position to convince the class that their word is the most essential. Next, they prepare their reasoning behind choosing the word by completing the question about the literary devices that are impacted by the word.

At the end of the lesson, each group shares out their word and their justification for choosing it. In the past this final activity has led to heated debates among groups who defend their word as the most essential. It opens up key discussions of denotation vs connotation, author's craft and purpose, and, specifically, the impact of a single word on the text. The aesthetic formatting of the organizer helps students "see" and make connections between and among the word and the devices; if the organizer were in a different form, say a list with the most important word at the top, it would not illuminate the interconnectedness of all the devices: the devices are working together to make an impactful statement that begins with one single word choice. Also, because they begin by writing their word in the middle box of the organizer first, it symbolically and literally encourages them to work from the inside out of a text; this can lead to an important reflection after the lesson about the process of analysis. They can sequence their actions throughout the lesson and think critically about when and how they were analyzing.

I can think of no other graphic organizer that connects to so many of the ELA standards while keeping activities simple for students, nor is there another graphic organizer that I so frequently suggest to other teachers. Because the organizer encourages students to be inquisitive about a text, form an opinion about it, and prove their opinion, it is building independent readers in a way that a teacher directed lesson on diction does not. I could stand up in front of the class and tell them why a word has power in the text, but giving them this organizer means giving them ownership and agency of their most precious gift: their education, and that is the most important gift we can give them.

THE FIRST YEAR PRINCIPAL
Adam Dovico

July 17, 2017. I was handed the master keys to Moore Magnet Elementary, and I was now officially the fifth principal in its history. Moore is a Title 1 public school of about 600 students set within a commercial area of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The school has a rich history; it was the first magnet school in the city dating back to 1971. It has long-tenured faculty and families across the county who have deep ties to the school.

Going into the job, one of the biggest pieces of advice I received from fellow administrators was “don’t change anything your first year.” The overwhelming sentiment was to sit back and observe. Sound advice, for sure, but the truth of the matter is that that’s just not my style. I had a vision for what I wanted to bring to the school, and I didn’t have a year of “sitting back” to wait.

In my career, I have had the opportunity to travel to 200-plus schools in over 30 states. I have seen all types of schools, from rural to suburban to urban and everything in between. I have seen “successful” schools and “failing” schools, and I can attest to the power of three distinct pillars for those schools that I consider successful: a strong culture, high-levels of engagement, and rigorous teaching.

My personal belief is that without a positive culture, the other pillars are more challenging to achieve. I view culture as the feeling you get when you walk into a place. It can be produced by the people, aesthetics, or habits that are exhibited. Therefore, it was my first goal to address Moore Magnet’s culture as the new school leader. In my opening meeting with my staff, I clearly stated four expectations to be implemented across the school. They were dubbed the “Moore Four.” They are as follows:

- 1) Tracking (looking at) the person speaking.
- 2) Using manners and respect (yes/no sir/ma’am; please and thank you).
- 3) Making positive first impressions through a system we call S.P.E.C.I.A.L. (**S**hake hands, **P**osture, **E**ye contact, **C**harm, **I**ntroduce yourself, **A**sk a question, **L**ean in and **L**isten).
- 4) Standing up to respond to a question and answering in a complete sentence.

These four concrete, observable behaviors are expected across the school. By establishing *consistent* expectations, I envisioned easier transitions from one year to the next and an opportunity for teachers to “speak” the same language with any student in the school.

No change is complete without modeling, and that is what had to be done at all levels to initiate this effort. To start, I modeled with my teachers and staff what the Moore Four would look like in the classroom and across the school. From there, I spent the entire first week of school modeling for the students these new expectations in our Morning Rally, a 45-minute school assembly where we are able to celebrate students, teach character education lessons, model school initiatives, and hold fun competitions. For example, to show how to make positive first impressions through SPECIAL, during Morning Rally I had teachers come up to role play what positive and negative impressions looked like as students entered the school each day or walked down the hallway.

Our shift in culture was not just about what we were saying and doing, but what we looked like as well. One of the first “changes” was redesigning my office. I took out one of the two large desks to open up the space. I also painted my back wall in blackboard paint, which turned into a canvas where chalk creations exploded. This small action empowered others to also paint their rooms in bright colors and beautiful murals. My art teacher immediately began painting the hallways and has been given the entire school as her canvas.

Culture dominated my thoughts the first weeks of school. The efforts included a First Day of School Block Party, creating “Awesome Office Visits” to celebrate students showing excellent behavior, rethinking morning work into Morning Choice, holding a Community Day, and much more. As our culture solidified, we were able to begin erecting our other two pillars: engagement and rigor.

To build engagement “toolboxes” with my teachers, I believe that high-quality, continual professional development is essential. I called upon my dear friend Dr. Pat Cunningham to deliver literacy training for my entire staff before school started, which led into individual grade workshops in the weeks that followed. In addition, I was fortunate to be able to bring teachers along with me to my former employer, the Ron Clark Academy, to witness exemplary teaching and engagement in action.

The results of these trainings are evident; teachers are using Word Walls, playing engaging learning games, building classroom stages, and rethinking their lesson plans to make them more student centered.

While I could feel culture building and see engagement taking place, I knew that ultimately we would be judged by our data, namely test scores. To grow our students, we would need to push them academically. Rigor needed to be bumped up! The challenge is that rigor isn’t pretty. It doesn’t use bright colors or fancy decorations. To me, rigor means that we are teaching to the top student. *Every student in every class needs to be challenged.* And not only do the expectations need to remain high, but students need to produce work of high quality. This means that we would have to figure out a way to push our top learners while still motivating our struggling students.

As the second quarter rolled around, I modeled for my staff what it would like to “stick with a student.” This unique concept involves not calling on another student when the first doesn’t know the answer right away. It means not accepting “I don’t know” as an acceptable answer. We would need to hold our students accountable, and the only way to do that was to rethink how we were teaching.

I began requiring higher order thinking questions and activities to be identified on lesson plans. In professional learning team (PLT) meetings, teachers brainstormed ways to add depth of knowledge to their content. My assistant principal and I went into classrooms and modeled the type of rigor we were expecting. Our walk through observation tool was solely focused on levels of rigor. Several teachers began experimenting with backward design and a constructivist approach to instruction. There was no shortage of initiatives and efforts to increase the rigor, but the real question is whether or not it would have an impact.

While I would love to have final results of our efforts tomorrow, I know that I am running a marathon, and pacing our way through the year will lead to far better results than any quick fix programs. Strategic rollout of initiatives, celebrations along the way, and putting the right people in the right roles are what I dream about at night. Though the journey is just beginning, a look back over the first few months has shown that “sitting back” just wasn’t going to work for me.

TUTOR ONE CHILD; CHANGE TWO LIVES:
A VOLUNTEER'S STORY
Carol Danforth

Recently, I enjoyed a moment “in the hall” with a second grade teacher as we quickly shared the successes and needs of our mutual student. I left the school feeling grateful for Ms. Mathis and our partnership. For eight years, I have been a school volunteer, tutoring elementary children in a one-on-one setting through the Winston-Salem Augustine Literacy Project. This note is to let teachers know that collaborating with a school volunteer can lead to improved academic skills for the student, but also to a transformative experience for the volunteer. In fact, that is why the Augustine Literacy Project adopted the motto: “Tutor one child; change two lives.”

Meeting a young second grader who smiles with bright eyes and almost runs to the classroom door to leave with me is a delight for a 68 year old who has “retired” from a lifetime of professional identity. As we sit down to work on a series of multisensory activities designed to advance reading and writing skills at his or her individual pace, we are partners. Yes, I the trained adult make the plan and set the limits, but we both work for the same result. We smile together, we laugh, and we regroup and push through the hard parts. The result is that a student who has a deficit in reading and writing is confidently engaging in acquiring new skills.

Working with one child, twice a week for multiple years, allows me to enter the world of that student. Within a few weeks, I begin to see through the eyes and heart of him or her: the joy of running fast in a football uniform, the pride of a girl when she speaks of her aunt who serves in the army, the quiet certainty of a nine-year-old that Mom’s job is essential for the well-being of all in the family. Working together throughout a school year, the student and I create a bond that transcends age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Together we are exploring and claiming reading and writing skills, and enjoying each other in the process!

Over time, I know that my world has grown because of these sacred partnerships at school. When I consider current cultural issues, I am mindful of my young friends and their families. When I decide how to apportion my charitable contributions, I’m influenced by the young people I know. When I vote, I sense my students trusting me. Given an opportunity, I am quick to offer others my firsthand observations of hard-working and caring teachers and the lively classrooms they create. And I am so pleased to tell friends and family about the young students I know who are bravely building their reading and writing skills. These are benefits that occur when teachers and community volunteers work together.

In June of 2016 a student texted me his photograph on the day of his eighth grade graduation, a picture which showed him holding a large plaque naming him the Student of the Year at his middle school. I smiled through tears. As a second grader, he had cried at his inability to read like other kids in his class. For the next five years his teachers allowed me to partner with them, as we worked toward building his fundamental language arts skills. He and I did very important work together. We taught each other. Two lives were changed. And this student is well on his way to continue his education and contribute to his community.

Author’s Note: The Winston-Salem Augustine Literacy Project is a division of READWS (Read-Write-Spell) in Forsyth County, NC. See readws.org for more information about this nonprofit that trains and supports volunteer tutors for economically disadvantaged students who have reading deficits. The tutoring project has grown to over 180 tutors working with 220 students in 38 schools in Forsyth County (2017 data). READWS also is engaged in teacher training through their Educator Academy and in parent education through their Reading Party program.

The Augustine Literacy Project began in Chapel Hill in 1994 and currently has ALP programs in seventeen cities in four states, with 13 chapters in NC.

As local leader of Authoring Action, I brought two articulate, young black students to my Baptist Church one bright Sunday morning and they each “preached” about having moved from disillusionment and uncertain futures to clear hope of a life that really meant something. Their beautifully chosen words were their way of Authoring Action, not merely aimlessly floating through life.

Mission

Authoring Action’s mission is to transform the lives of students through the power of creative writing, the spoken word, visual and media arts, filmmaking, and leadership education that promotes positive, systemic change. This transformation focuses on students ages 13 through 18 who face one or more significant barriers to their positive development and success in school and in life.

Michael and Elijah Authors

Many of our students express a sense of disconnection with the larger community, often as a reaction to negative experiences regarding their race, socioeconomic status, and other factors, but they rediscover a sense of possibility for themselves in the greater community through the work of Authoring Action.

Michael Hauser, “Special”

“I wanted to be special so bad. When I was younger I used to play this game with my classmates. We were selected humans destined to find and destroy an evil entity.”

Elijah Pone, “Identity”

“My mother never told me I was black. So I’ve spent 18 years bending and stretching in this exoskeleton sheathing myself from the world.”

Student authors benefit significantly from their experience of Authoring Action’s unique intensive and transformative program by learning critical thinking, strong communication skills, and how they use the spoken word as a total tool to share their unique insights and perspectives with their peers and a broad range of adults, while advocating for positive social change within the broader community.

While our direct work with students has an enormous positive impact on their individual lives, its Outreach Ensemble serves our community through events and activities designed to promote student to adult and student to student exchange, cross cultural understanding, and community bridge-building.

Authoring Action’s signature creative writing and the spoken word curriculum provide a framework and foundation for the organization’s programming.

Professional writers, alumni mentors, and professional artists in filmmaking, choreography, music, and other disciplines serve as mentors who deliver the program. A set of defined methods and processes guide students in exploring selected topics, writing original pieces that illuminate their lives, and adapting these in collected works in order to prepare them for public engagements and film productions for community leaders, youth workers, educators, and other groups. Because students work in a context defined by caring role models who promote high expectations and provide opportunities for students to contribute to their community, participants develop mastery of the skills needed to succeed in the culture. Most importantly they learn to take personal responsibility for

authoring the next chapter of their lives and discovering they have a role in shaping the world.

Implementing Action: Writing to the Senses

The Creative Performance Art and Spoken Word writing course is designed to build students' existing vocabulary and their life experiences to create original written works worthy of literary performance. This approach makes use of existing and new grammatical forms, vital vocabulary, and clear exposition to create a stream of consciousness narrative, prose statements, dramatic monologues, poems, and personal raps. Ensemble performances employ fresh nouns and lively adjectives to create scenes that convey vivid sensory moments to the reader and to the audience and heightened confidence and self-esteem working with one another to use their cultural achievement in life experience differences.

First Ink Discussion: A signature process that focuses on discussion.

Discussion is the beginning stage in storytelling, editorials, journals, essays, written words, lyrics, and script writing. These exchanges presume that each student is a special means of discovery. This approach motivates immediate critical thinking, creates a "think-tank" where all learn from one and one learns from all. These discussions create experiential learning sessions and initiate a new form of research where students build a signature approach to writing to a theme. The discussion process enables the teacher to lead a discussion where every thought and word, both oral and written, will originate from the student ensemble regardless of the student's achievement level.

Stream of Consciousness: Work arising from their Attic, Room, and Basement Self.

This writing technique helps every student render an experience of a character's internal mental activity. It is designed to give the impression of an ever-changing series of thoughts, emotions, images, and memories. The textbook example of this kind of writing is found in the last section of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. It presents varying states of mental activity. The term "stream" refers to the fact that this series of physiological variations is never, under normal conditions, interrupted.

This narrative represents the random process of the character's thoughts and sense impressions and may consist largely of sentence fragments. The term "interior monologue" is sometimes used synonymously.

Writing to the Senses: RIFFS

Vignettes use a noun to express an idea such as courage or an emotion such as happiness. Senses are defined as situations in which a character goes after something and something happens: "Love, Your hands hold my heart and I live."

Monologues: students review their First Ink discussion and write their monologue or story riffs. At the end of the session they read their riffs to better sense how this form works most effectively.

Shout Outs: Adjectives that are sense words and adjectives that modify common nouns are used in this exercise to generate engaging language.

Poems, Raps, Lyrics, Stories: Students read their First Ink Discussion of the theme and review the methods for writing the story or verse. They write poems, lyrics, wraps, and stories and at the end of the session read their creations to the group.

Presentation: Students choose one of three pieces to read to the group and edit it using comments from the workshop facilitator. Through this series of exercises, the students will vocalize, memorize, and learn to orate their chosen pieces. Mentors, artists, teachers work with the students to adapt their pieces into an ensemble performance or an art presentation.

Refine, Rehearse, Present: student ensembles use these three steps toward excellence to present a stunning performance and adaptation of creative writing for community audiences.

All of this hard work, of course, is done to present powerful and exciting Oral Statements but primarily as a way of authoring the action of their lives. Both goals are worth pursuing and intensify the action of the classroom.

Michael

My mother and grandmother called it delusions; I called it goals.
You might call it unorderly.
I call it a building block.

Elijah

I am lost and honestly I wouldn't want to be anywhere else
Because lost is only a phase
But when tomorrow comes, lost will be but a dream and my doubts are that of a haze

TEACHER INTERVIEW: HEATHER WILEY
Joan Mitchell

1. How would you describe your instructional philosophy? What are the theories or central ideas that undergird the decisions that you make each day in the classroom? Explain the why behind what you do. Consider details such as your classroom arrangement and practices that encourage student engagement.

It is my students who are the driving force behind everything that I do. I adore them. It is their light and challenges, their determination and disappointment, their playfulness and struggles for which I work hard. My personal teaching style is a balance of student-led and teacher-led activities that provides my students with individual support and modeling to help them grow as individuals and learn the material but also the freedom to make their own choices about their education. Self-selected reading, self-assessment, peer assessment, and self-reflection are all ways I provide student choice. For my seniors in AP Literature, I plan lessons that are a balance between preparing them for the exam and preparing them for life in the hopes that they leave high school as people who better understand themselves before they become independent citizens in society. With my standard freshmen, I strive to spark a love of literature and provide them with the necessary skills that lead them toward becoming lifelong readers.

2. What is your favorite text to teach and how do you teach it?

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a novel that I love to teach because its impactful themes provide relevant context to many of the racial tensions in our culture today. Last summer I had the opportunity to attend a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar on Zora Neale Hurston in Orlando, Florida, which immersed me in the world where she grew up and gave me a whole new perspective on teaching the text. Many of the activities I discovered at the seminar can help students approach and access the text. I focus on the topic of identity and explicate it through the lens of the monomyth of the Hero's Journey: my students examine and analyze the impact of a black female hero and the effects of Janie's choices on both historic and current culture. Creating a webquest to have students research information about historic and current Eatonville and the struggles the town has faced and is currently facing can illuminate the importance of place in the novel and provide material for critical analysis of how Eatonville shapes Janie's person. Having students use a Venn Diagram to compare Janie in Eatonville in chapter 1 versus her role in the town in chapter 6 can orient them further to the importance of the place and the impact it has on her later journeys and self-identification.

3. What forms of media and technology enhance or facilitate instruction in your classroom?

Google Drive and Google Docs have created increased opportunities for collaboration and discussion among my students. They self-assess, peer-assess, and write both creatively and analytically together because we have access to Chromebooks and Google Drive. Instead of writing notes about another student's essay on a piece of paper that could get lost, they make comments, highlight, and utilize the editing tools on Google Docs which allows me to monitor their ability to write about and talk about another student's writing without shuffling through 100 papers. Because Google Docs is set up to be collaborative, there is a literal dialogue that happens between the reader and the writer. It makes teaching writing more about teaching students to talk about writing and talk with one another about writing as opposed to a one-way communication between the teacher and the student. Students then leave high school with the ability to interact critically with their own writing and the writing of others rather than merely focusing on correcting writing.

4. Describe your approach to meeting the needs of diverse learners in your classroom. Consider student differences in culture, race, gender, learning styles, and academic ability.

Through arts integration and activities that include multiple intelligences, I teach the standards in a way that fosters engagement while still building skills. These practices also allow me to pull in diverse print and nonprint texts from different eras and from racial and culturally diverse artists, filmmakers, and authors in a way that enriches learning for students with differing ability levels and learning styles. My favorite arts integrated activity is teaching the elements of visual art to explain the impact of symbolism: we examine how each of the five basic elements of visual art (line, color, shape, texture, and space) are utilized in famous pieces of art like Aaron Douglas' *The Judgment Day* to create a deeper meaning beyond the surface picture. Then, each student crafts a theme that illuminates his or her life and illustrates the theme by employing the five elements of visual art symbolically in a drawing that is either concrete or abstract.

5. Where do you find your best new teaching ideas? Do you rely on web content generated from other teachers, conversations with teachers you know, journals, professional conferences, or other resources?

Through my experiences at the NCTE Annual Conference, volunteering for Wake Forest University's MTF program, attending National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Institutes, and reading everything I can get my hands on about the population of students I'm teaching, I strive to submerge myself in all the resources available within my content area. While working on these many different levels provides me with knowledge that is both deep and wide, it is the relationships I build with other educators that are most precious to me because they mean that I can ask for help from a variety of sources who are anxious and willing to provide relevant and rigorous materials. I have learned over the years that surrounding myself with educators who enjoy reading, discussing, and writing about texts is where I find my best resources: a community of people who are in love with their profession and advocate for their students.

THE GIFT OF NARRATIVE
Rachael Duane

This time of year, as winter settles and deepens across the continent, I thirst for stories. The kind told around a fire in the fireplace—that requires a warm cup of something in hand. It is easy for me, in this season, to imagine a childhood filled with storytelling—the play and the art of it, alike. It's not the childhood I remember for myself exactly. This organic-yet-dedicated form of storytelling certainly seems an even rarer form of education now. And yet, I was reminded recently of the incredible breadth of "story"—of all the ways we participate in what we might call, in our classrooms, "narrative." Narrative, Alan Shapiro reminds us in his collection of essays on poetry *In Praise of the Impure*, "...is the movement of mind in the act of questioning; it is the 'quest,' so to speak, in questioning—the looking for, if not the finding."

By this definition, all poetry, all good art—and certainly the mind of a student engaged with literature—performs the act of narrative. Some of the best examples of that narrative work we find, of course, in poetry. In poetry, Shapiro points out, "an interest in narrative procedures can be seen as a desire to move beyond the private experience of the isolated self and establish contact with the lives of others, with the social world and with the past." When we read or write or recite poetry, we should consider what the mind of the poem (its speaker) seeks. How does it question? What is its quest? What does it look for? What does it find?

When we read or write or recite poetry, we share in the narrative, in the communal search for meaning. For its manipulated structure and sound, poetry has a special way of making that search experiential and nuanced. It is the special privilege of teachers to give this complicated gift of poetic "story." It is also the privilege of family members and friends. So grab a warm beverage and enjoy this poem (from Shapiro to me to you) as a seasonal gift. Consider the poem's incredible ability to accommodate the complexities of relationship. (How does the speaker make us feel about his father? How might diction or repetition or a particular line break affect our perception of that relationship?) Consider, as well, the poem's ability to return some understanding to the past. (How is time treated in the poem? How is perspective established?) In answering these questions, I think you'll find this poem a wonderful work of narrative. It's titled "Those Winter Sundays," by Robert Hayden.

Those Winter Sundays

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

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WRITERS' WORDS
Lucy Milner

The Writers' Words feature offers snippets from the writing of miscellaneous observers who have something evocative to suggest to educators (particularly those of English language and letters) and their students. Readers report using these fragments as prompts for essays and discussions and as catalysts for aspiring and reluctant readers and writers.

"There is no subject so old that something new cannot be said about it."
Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881)

"Most writers enjoy two periods of happiness—when a glorious idea comes to mind and, secondly, when a last page has been written and you haven't had time to know how much better it ought to be."

J. B. Priestley (1894 –1984)

"All good writing is swimming under water and holding your breath."
F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896 –1940)

"A writer's like anybody else except when he's writing."
Shelby Foote (1916–2005)

"Writing is a concentrated form of thinking. I don't know what I think about certain subjects, even today, until I sit down and try to write about them."
Don DeLillo (1936–)

POSTS

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: BIG-GAME HUNTING IN AFRICA

Elizabeth Davis

"African Elephants: Should Trophy Ban Be Lifted?"

Author...Editorial Staff

Source...The Week; page 17

Date Published...1 December 2017

Basic Concept: *This article discusses the ethical dilemmas involved in legalizing the shipment of trophies from big-game hunting into America. Contrary to popular belief, trophy hunting can actually protect the endangered African elephant species. The fees from hunters' excursions can be used to promote much-needed conservation efforts. Yet while the article notes the benefits of big-game hunting, the intelligence and gentleness of these animals creates a catch-22 for conservationists.*

Commentary: *This article is likely to spark controversy among animal-lovers and environmentalists alike by considering the limits of the human/animal divide and our ethical obligations to the animal kingdom. Additionally, the article provides insights into the consequences of both Machiavellian and utilitarian ethics in its discussion of the profits of trophy hunting. Do the ends justify the means in this scenario? Do the needs of the elephant species outweigh the lives of a few gentle giants?*

Quotations:

"Without trophy hunters like Donald Jr., there would be no hunting industry, which pays many Africans' wages, and no funding for anti-poaching efforts that protect the overall elephant population."

"Does the Trump administration really want to help rich men armed with high-powered rifles slaughter these gentle giants and then return home 'with the bloody proof of their manliness'?"

Questions:

-What does it mean to be an animal, and how do our definitions of what it means to be human shape that definition?

-In what situations should we compromise to reach a decision, and in what situations should we hold fast?

Allied Texts:

-"Shooting an Elephant," George Orwell

-Eating Animals, Jonathan Safran Foer

FEATURED AUTHORS

Brianna Brown

A graduate of the NC Teaching Fellows program at UNC-Chapel Hill and the WFU MA-Ed. program, Brianna Brown is in her eighth year of teaching. Brianna taught 10th grade English (World Literature) in Davie County and Wake County public schools for 7 years before making the radical shift to teach at a private middle school. She currently teaches 7th grade (Medieval) and 8th grade (American) Literature courses and coaches Middle and High School Cross-Country at Thales Academy in Rolesville, NC.

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A retired educator, formerly a high school English teacher and, more recently, an elementary school counselor with the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools. She earned a B.A. in English and an M. A. Ed in counseling at Wake Forest University. She lives in Winston-Salem and is completing her second term as a member of the Advisory Board of READWS.

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An accomplished teacher, principal, college professor, author, and speaker who has spent his career working with schools and educators across the country on building school culture, engaging students, and figuring out what you *can* do for kids!

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Has taught English at R.J. Reynolds High School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina for the past fifteen years. She is a National Board Certified teacher who was named the 2016-2017 high school Teacher of the Year finalist for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. Heather is a cooperating teacher for Wake Forest University's Master Teaching Fellows program, and she has presented at local and national English conferences. Heather loves spending time with her husband, Cris, and her two small children.

Call for Articles and Posts

NAL is an online quarterly journal that is inclusive of multiple disciplines. *NAL* seeks articles that explore engaging literary texts or basic ideas from diverse fields such as art, religion, politics, natural sciences that engage students in the classrooms of grades 6–12.

In addition to the Articles published in each of the four issues, readers are encouraged to submit wide-ranging, shorter Posts that follow a simple template.

Template for Posts

1. Title of Post
2. Post writer
3. Basic bibliographic information: Text's Title, Author, Source, Publication Date, Internet Link
4. Brief concept of the Post
5. Comment
6. Two or three crucial quotes from the text
7. Two or more probing questions about the text
8. Two or more allied texts that support or counter the same topic

Submission Process for Articles and Posts

- Manuscripts should be sent electronically to Hannah Goodwin, Assistant to the Editor (goodhl15@wfu.edu).
- Submissions should range from 600 to 1000 words. Authors should use the most important word from their title on the bottom right side of each page alongside the page number of each page. Pages should be double spaced throughout (including quotations, notes, and works cited) with standard margins.
- A brief statement should be provided that states that the manuscript has not been published or is not submitted elsewhere.
- Copies of everything you send us should be saved. We cannot return any materials to authors.
- Authors' names should not appear in the text or the reference list. Substitute 'Author' for citations in the text and in the reference list.
- Two Submissions Editors review submitted manuscripts within 20 days of their receipt. If the manuscript is accepted, the editors will provide suggestions for revision and return the revised text within 20 days to the author.

Publication and Submission Deadlines

Fall, September 15: Submit by July 15
Winter, December 15: Submit by October 15
Spring, March 15: Submit by January 15
Summer, June 15: Submit by April 15

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