Oregon has long valued the importance of poetry, naming a statewide poet laureate prior to the establishment of the national U.S. Poet Laureate. In 1973, the governor of Oregon named Edwin Markham as the first state poet laureate; Ben Hur Lampman and Ethel Romig Fuller followed. These were lifetime appointments with no pay and were mostly ceremonial positions in the state legislature. This remained the case until the appointment of the fourth Oregon Poet Laureate, William Stafford, from 1975 to 1989. The state legislature made the position official in 1989 and funds from the Oregon Cultural Trust expanded it as a paid position to include outreach as an ambassador of poetry across the state. The governor was to honor a resident poet who has captured “the beauty and spirit of the state through the medium of verse.” Legislation created appointments of two years, with possibility of an additional two-year term. Oregon’s fifth laureate was Lawson Fusae Inada (2008-2010), followed by Paulann Peterson (2010-2014), Peter Sears (2014-2016), and Elisabeth Woody (2016-2018).

Field Trips Aren’t Just for Kids: A Stop on Langston Hughes’ Stoop in New York City by Delanna Heidrick

This summer I completed a pilgrimage of the East Coast homes and final resting places of several major American authors. Each stop on my journey provided intriguing back stories to add to classroom slide shows, and the reverent feeling of touching the same floorboards as the greats. But 20 East 127th Street, NYC, did more than hold historical significance; it also offered present-day relevance.

The one-time home of Langston Hughes is an architectural wonder complete with crisp white walls, dark amber hardwood floors, and an ornately decorated fireplace mantel alongside sun-drenched floor-to-ceiling windows under a canopy of ornamental plaster. The well-preserved brownstone has been converted into an elegant non-profit arts collective by Portland native and New York Times Best-selling author Renee Watson, who will also be a one-time contributor to the Oregon English Journal. My heart sang at the sight of Hughes’ piano and typewriter, and my soul longed to know his cheerful home is once again buzzing with creativity.

The apples don’t fall far from the tree: The Staffords and the Osage Orange Tree by Lynette Gottlieb

As a teacher and parent, a fun by-product of those roles is observing the ways my own children and those that I teach may (or may not) take after their parents. I have a son who is following my musical path, and one who is on his own unique athleticism route. At parent-teacher conferences, I love to see the ways in which parents’ faces sometimes stockily resemble those of their kids. There are parents who are by turns as disorganized or type-A as their progeny. I know an outgoing mom who is navigating her daydreaming daughter’s introversion and lack of class participation. These blended families whose children are combining to live with one another, learning “how to be” in this new version of their family, and there are families with adopted children where some details of “nature” may be unanswerable, or more, but the emphasis of “nurture” becomes the heart of their home. Parenting is never far from teaching. Anyone who has been staff on a field trip takes the idea of it personally to heart!

OCTE is gearing up for an exciting fall conference at Wilsonville HS on Oct, 12, during which our keynote speaker, Oregon poet laureate Kim Stafford, will share his poetry and pedagogy. So far, I have not yet brought Kim Stafford’s work into my classroom, and I have high hopes that the conference will inspire me to do so. Meanwhile, I can claim his father, William Stafford (1914-1993) as a resource. During the centenary year of his birth, my school librarian/3rd-grade teacher and I successfully applied for a grant offered by the Green Stables library, for a class set of The Osage Orange Tree, edited by Dennis Cunningham and published by Trinity Press for the first time that year. It was a story that William Stafford entered into a contest in 1959 to celebrate the Oregon Centennial, sponsored by the state. He won both categories in the public division, for a poem called “Memorials of a Tour Around Mt. Hood,” and The Osage Orange Tree. Most years since receiving my grant for a class set, I have short units on William Stafford in my 8th grade English class, including biographical information, an overview of what “poet laureate” is, and a reader-response assignment on The Osage Orange Tree.

The story is beautiful, atmospheric take reminiscent of Steinbeck’s The Red Pony or those of Eudora Welty. It is Depression-era, a time my students become acquainted with in literature through 6th-grade readings of the poetry collection Out of the Dust (1999), by Karen Hesse and the graphic novel, The Storm in the Barn (2011), by Michael Pihlan. One of the aspects we dwell on a bit during our study is the idea of “place.” William Stafford, despite being associated to such a degree with Oregon, grew up in Kansas, where The Osage Orange Tree takes place. Thematically, this ties well with another author we read, Willa Cather, who is much more influential in the Nebraska frontier, though she spent her early childhood in Virginia. (We read My Antonia.)

8th graders meet The Osage Orange Tree with a range of reactions; some students find it subtly frustrating, while others understand it and find it beautiful. They all see that “nothing much happens” and many are able to comprehend the feeling of loss that Naomi Shihab Nye eloquently addresses in her Afterword. This is a story of what might have been, of the loss of something that was never held to begin with, similar to Oak in Maya Angelou’s “The Necklace” or D. Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi.”

The newsletter of the Oregon Council of Teachers of English

Volume 41, No. 3, Fall 2019

Please join us for the OCTE Fall Conference at Wilsonville High School, Sat, Oct. 12, 2019, 8:45 am to 3:30 pm. Our keynote speaker is Oregon Poet Laureate, Kim Stafford.

• Breakfast and Lunch
• One free Oregon Spirit Book Award title of your choice
• 2018 Oregon Spirit Book Awards and Authors
• PDUs
• Optional graduate credit through Lewis and Clark College
• Exhibitors
• Elementary and Secondary Strands

Kim Stafford is the founding director of the Northwest Writing Institute at Lewis & Clark College, where he has taught writing since 1974. He is the author of a dozen books of poetry and prose, including, The Means Among Us: Elowan’s Listening and Other Poemscapes of the Writer’s Craft and A Thousand Friends of Rain: New & Selected Poems. His most recent books are 100 Tricks Every Boy Can Do: How My Brother Disappeared, and Wind on the Waves: Stories from the Oregon Coast. In 2016 the 30th anniversary edition of his collections of essays, Nearing Everything Right, came out from Pharaoh Editions. He has taught writing in dozens of schools and community centers, in Scotland, Italy, and Bhutan.

The Osage Orange Tree

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Please respond in paragraph format to the following questions:

1. What is the greater life commentary here?
2. What do you find most interesting? What makes the text work?
3. What does the text on this page function? What makes it work? Be as precise and minimal as possible with your observations.
4. What do you think the story situation for Evergreen? Spend about a paragraph writing a situational backstory for her family. Write it earnestly, in the tone and world of Stafford (not condescending).
5. Suggest a message from the story. What might Stafford be trying to tell us? What is the greater life commentary here?

Fall Conference Presenters


“Great Plains Shelterbelt” a WPA projects launched in 1934; and second, that the tree might be literally “fruitful,” but not for edible enjoyment. To quote

On learning more about the Osage Orange tree as a plant, I learned two facts that resonate perfectly with the story (who knows whether William Stafford chose this particular tree in light of these first two, that it has a windbreak and natural fencing in the prairie states, or that President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Great Plains Shelterbelt” a WPA projects launched in 1934; and second, that the tree might be literally “fruitful,” but not for edible enjoyment. To quote

Most folks today, though, know it only for its distinctly ugly, almost otherworldly-looking fruit: an inedible, fuzzy green on the size of a grapefruit or large orange, with a warty, furrowed surface sparsely covered with long, coarse hairs. When you break the globe open, it exudes a bitter, milky, sticky sap that eventually turns black and that gives some people an irritating rash.

It sounds as ominous as the apple in the Garden of Eden.

Below is my question set for 8th graders, but I would suggest that this is easily adapted for higher grade level use. Teaching this story by William Stafford is a pleasure and contributes to the celebration of our Oregon authors and the pride we have as Oregon teachers when we get to bring the legacies of Ursula Le Guin, William Stafford, Kim Stafford, Beverly Cleary, or Ken Kesey to our classrooms.

Philosophy

Fall Conference Presenters

Using Children’s Literature to Introduce Social Justice

Time is the scarcest resource controlling our lives as teachers. Most of us are looking for quick, engaging writing activities or time savers. Lend me your ear; I’ve got 15 minutes between you. When introducing the Osage Orange tree, I also gave my students time on task with our WPA projects launched in 1934; and second, that the tree might be literally “fruitful,” but not for edible enjoyment. To quote

Time is the scarcest resource controlling our lives as teachers. Most of us are looking for quick, engaging writing activities or time savers. Lend me your ear; I’ve got 15 minutes between you. When introducing the Osage Orange tree, I also gave my students time on task with our WPA projects launched in 1934; and second, that the tree might be literally “fruitful,” but not for edible enjoyment. To quote

Anatomy of a page: Make multiple observations about word choice (verbs, nouns, level of vocabulary, adjectives), tone/mood, sentence structures and lengths, length of text, dialogue or lack thereof, literary devices, and so forth. How does the text on this page function? What makes it work? Be as precise and minimal as possible with your observations.

Artistic interpretation: Who made the art and what is it medium? How do the images function on their own in terms of color, shape, and design? How do they relate to the text and how do they elaborate on the text?

Read the “Afterword” and consider the following:

a) in what way does the boy’s and Evergreen’s lives connect? In what way do they miss out on connection?

b) What do you think Nye means by “showing up” for writing?

c) What do you learn about Stafford’s writing habits in general from the Afterword?

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The Oregonian

Fact-Check & Writing: A Closer Look at the WPA’s ”Great Plains Shelterbelt” Projects


Laurie Dougherty

The Oregonian


Walk in Their Shoes: Children and Young Adult Books About Social Justice


Cultivating Close Reading, Building Comprehension and Writing: Theos Project for Literacy Development


Walk in Their Shoes: Children and Young Adult Books About Social Justice


Fall Conference Presenters

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