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**Chalkboard** is the newsletter of the Oregon Council of Teachers of English, an organization that has existed for 100 years to support teachers of English and the language arts in Oregon elementary and secondary schools, community colleges and universities.

**Chalkboard** is our way of keeping our many members and friends informed about OCTE activities, programs of the National Council of Teachers of English, conferences and learning opportunities for students, research tidbits, book recommendations, and more.

**Chalkboard** is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange.

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# Chalkboard

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PETER THACKER, EDITOR

OREGON COUNCIL of TEACHERS of ENGLISH  
OREGON COUNCIL for the SOCIAL STUDIES  
**2015 Fall Conference • October 3, 2015**  
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY • 2811 NE Holman Street • Portland, OR 97211

## FALL CONFERENCE CHAIR'S INVITATION

*Laurie Dougherty, Seaside Heights Elementary*

I am pleased to announce that OCTE (Oregon Council of Teachers of English) and OCSS (Oregon Council for the Social Studies) are hosting a joint fall conference October 3, 2015, at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon. With our theme "Through the Eyes of Another: Inclusive Social Studies and Literacy Education" we will explore the connections between English Language Arts and the Social Studies. I'm very excited about our conference and encourage you to attend.



*New York Times* bestselling children's and young adult author, Laurie Halse Anderson will be our keynote speaker. Known for tackling tough subjects with humor and sensitivity, her work has earned numerous national and state awards, as well as international recognition. Two of her books, *Speak* and *Chains*, were National Book Award finalists. Laurie was honored with the 2009 Margaret A. Edwards Award given by YALSA division of the American Library Association for her "significant and lasting contribution to young adult literature." So many of us have used Laurie's books in our classrooms. This is a true coup (Elsewhere in this issue, see Mariko Walsh's piece describing how she uses *Speak* to help her ninth graders to find their voice).

In my own classroom, Halse Anderson's books like *Fever* have helped my students to see historical events "through the eyes of another." No more dry dates and places to memorize. Historical fiction helps them realize that these events were experienced by people with important stories to tell, like their own.

In addition we will be offering 18 conference sessions and workshops for K-12 levels. The Oregon Spirit Book Awards will be announced. We will have an author panel and an opportunity for author signing of

books purchased or received at the conference (all OCTE members get an OSBA winning book with their registration).

This conference is an excellent value, only \$75 for OCTE members, \$105 for non-members (first year membership included, plus breakfast and lunch). PDUs will be given and Graduate Credit is available through PSU. We have an outstanding conference planned and hope you will assist us in spreading the word.

Concordia University Library,  
site of Fall Conference





# NAVIGATING THE COMMON CORE

Laurie Dougherty, Seaside Heights Elementary School

How do we navigate the Common Core? Here, in the midst of our first round of Smarter Balanced testing, that is the burning question. With all the reports of controversy and parents opting out, it's easy to get caught up in the pressure of high-stakes testing and view it all as one package.

The CCSS define what students should know and be able to do. They do not direct us in "how" to teach, only "what" to teach. So with that in mind first and foremost, I want to do what works. As a teacher, I am responsible for the activities, the lessons, the pacing, and the learning culture in my classroom. This means using every opportunity to reach students where they are in order for them to be successful.

Like all navigators, we need some markers to help us steer our course. On the water, buoys, beacons, and lights guide the way. As I reflected on the question, I have come up with some channel markers of my own to help me navigate the Common Core.

**Be Intentional.** For example, when we gather students on a rug for read-aloud, rather than using this time for "catch-up work," we have the perfect opportunity to be intentional. Selecting engaging non-fiction and fiction texts, we can explore the author's craft and structure. On the word wall nearby, we can record rich language for students to incorporate into their own writing and vocabularies. Together we can compare and contrast the texts and build inferences based on textual evidence. This shared experience can provide a rich foundation for further interactions with texts.

**Combine Standards.** Rather than compartmentalizing instruction, the four strands can be woven together to create richer lessons. While

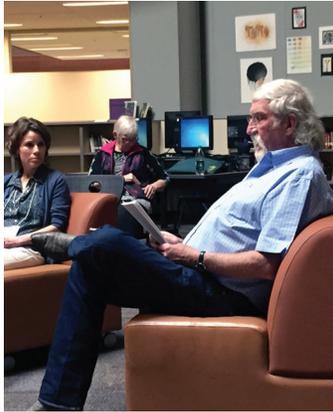
teaching science, social studies, or other content areas, we can emphasize reading, vocabulary, and writing.

**Leverage Practices Yielding the Most Student Growth.** One such practice is collaborative learning. The speaking and listening standards address listening thoughtfully, constructively questioning the ideas of others, contributing students' own ideas, and team work. By giving students opportunities to engage in guided interactions with texts and collaborative learning, we can foster their construction of new knowledge.

**Write to Learn.** Writing is a way of knowing. Students can write to build knowledge about a topic or reflect on a text. This writing might be a response to a short text selection, notes, summaries, or learning logs. As students learn to present information in an organized piece of writing, they develop a better understanding of the text, improving both reading comprehension and writing skills.

**Use Evidence.** Teaching students to use evidence from the text to support their opinions and ideas deepens their understanding and strengthens their arguments. Initially, we can provide sentence frames such as, "According to the text..." or "On page... in the text..." until students are able to construct their own.

Perhaps the best known navigational aid is the lighthouse. For me, the lighthouse has always been and will continue be the individual student. My students' individual learning needs will dictate what I do and how I do it, in order for them to be successful with the Common Core. My goal is for my students to develop habits of mind that foster critical thinking and creativity. My observations of my students will guide me as I make decisions about how to proceed with these standards.



Author Rick Steber at OCTE Spring Conference in Redmond

## CONNECTION BEFORE ARGUMENTATION?

Ed Sage, Gresham High School

When I give newer teachers advice, one of my caveats is, "This is just what I do, so take it with a grain of salt." I usually follow this up with, "Whatever I do in my classroom I'd be willing to explain and own."

I am being coy. I prefer "invitation" to "decree." I foster this in my students' writing. The mantras in our classroom are "perhaps" and "maybe." I like "I'm wondering if," and "I'm not sure, but I think." The kids use plenty of "evidence" and "support" in their pondering. After all, I do want them to back up what they don't know.

I find it so intriguing that there is a diminished focus on *persuasive papers* as we shift towards the writing of *argumentative papers* in the public schools. According to our district curriculum, persuasive papers rely much more on "emotional appeal." Argumentative papers are more "rational" and emotionally detached. I do believe that at the heart of both types of papers is the desire and intention to "be heard." Persuasive papers are more specifically attempting to change another person's mind. But even in argumentative papers, as our district puts it, "(The writer) presents multiple perspectives, (but) is clearly for one side." The intention is not necessarily to forge "connection" and understanding between the writer and the issues being addressed in the paper. That may happen, but it is a collateral event, a bi-product of the effort. To be clear, connection is not the explicit purpose of the writing. And that feels like a loss to me.



I struggle with the underlying agendas of both persuasive and argumentative writing. I am not certain they serve our children or our culture very well. Persuasive writing uses emotions to manipulate others. Argumentative writing deliberately acknowledges “opposing” viewpoints with the intent of discrediting or undermining them. We are collectively concerned that our students aren’t able to have a “point of view” that can be argued for. The truth is that I am more worried that we are not creating enough opportunities for students not to have an opinion to prove.

We have students arriving at persuasion and argument before they’ve had anywhere near enough time to ponder while remaining open to varied perspectives. I believe we might be undermining creativity and trust in this manner. Perhaps students simply need more time to arrive at questions. If you come visit my classroom, you will encounter the strongest of ideas couched in many “maybes” and “perhapses.” I think I can explain why we do it that way, and I can own it.

My brother, the engineer, explained to me years ago why bridges have to shake and buildings have to sway. All that metal and concrete rocking and flexing. If we build that flexibility into even the most stable, the most physical, the most “scientific” of things, why can’t we see the world of writing that same way?

## Editor’s Note

Dear Readers,

We have all been navigating CCSS and SBAC for the past year, and we have heard helpful information as we are moving along from Nicole Dalton, Language Arts Specialist for ODE. I want Chalkboard to be a forum for exchanging ideas and opinions as we teacher experts influence the implementation of the standards and assessments. To begin this process, three teachers, an elementary, middle and high school teacher have responded to my call for what they have learned, pondered, done this past year. Enjoy these varied lenses on the interaction between teaching and the Common Core. And, please, send in your stories. And don’t forget to share activities that are helping students to deepen their thinking and build critical reading and writing skills.

Appreciatively,  
Peter Thacker, Chalkboard Editor

# Negotiating the Glitches while Piloting SBAC

*Aly Ferris, Sawvie Island Academy*

As I write this, my 8th graders are finishing up the English Language Arts Performance Task portion of the Smarter Balanced Assessment. The code on their test reads G8 ELA PT, and though it is still using last year’s moniker, Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) it is actually a new test, created by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC).

The names and acronyms alone seem to require an Answer Key to understand, and I have a degree in education. When it comes time to explain the letters and their significance to parents and, perhaps most importantly, to the students that I am attempting to lead down a path toward knowledge, critical thinking, empathy, wit, and grammar, it gets even hairier. Especially when the kids ask, “What happens if I don’t do well on this test?” and (after silently congratulating myself that they said “well” instead of “good”) I have to answer “Nothing.”

Some students are calmed by the fact that this test won’t affect their college admission, their high school GPA, or even their grade in my class. Other students use that as a reason to click through the test as quickly as possible without putting forth any effort. As a teacher, it’s hard for me to justify granting so many instructional hours (eight so far, and my students are only through the ELA and Science tests—they still have both Math tests ahead of them) to taking an assessment that will not directly help the kids or my teaching of them.

Additionally, as the test is still in its early stages, it is bogged down with little errors and glitches in addition to important information left unexplained by the two pages worth of instructions that I have to read to my students every time they start a testing session. At times, the students randomly get kicked out of the test, or the sound bite that they are supposed to listen to won’t play, or after testing for an hour they fall asleep, drooling on their keyboard. It feels very much like they are the proverbial guinea pigs, and that this new assessment is a science experiment dreamed up by bureaucrats that need data to prove that our country’s education system is failing its students.

As frustrating, overwhelming, and littered with strange abbreviations as the new state test is, I don’t think that it’s all bad. In fact, I had one student comment that it was actually more interesting than the state tests that they normally take, because they were answering questions that weren’t just multiple choice. This student has been a struggling reader for years, and can be easily discouraged, so I was thrilled that she enjoyed the challenge of a more demanding test.

I also like that the new tests ask my students to read, evaluate, and then write. I think those are good skills to have. I just wish that there was a way for them to demonstrate that they have these skills without spending upwards of eight hours staring at a screen, with no immediate feedback as to whether or not their hard work is paying off. It seems a little like being on a hamster wheel; you can run as hard or as fast as you want, but you will never make any forward progress.

## *Please Post*

# USING THE VOICE IN *SPEAK* TO ENCOURAGE STUDENT NARRATIVE VOICE

*Mariko Walsh, Scio High School*

At the beginning of every school year I have my freshmen compose a narrative piece of writing to help facilitate introductions. One of my favorite pieces of writing to use as a model text of a compelling narrative is the first chapter of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*.

After reading the chapter together I ask students to go back and select four favorite passages. We then analyze eleven elements of style used to create a compelling narrative. Among these are pace, vocabulary, point of view, figures of speech, time, and paragraph structure. The students then analyze their four favorite parts to determine which elements Laurie Halse Anderson used. My students are always surprised at how many stylistic elements they can find in just a few sentences. For example, the following four sentences are always very popular:

“Thwap! A lump of potatoes and gravy hits me square in the center of my chest. All conversation stops as the entire lunchroom gawks, my face burning into their retinas. I will forever be known as “that girl who got nailed by potatoes the first day,” (p. 8).

Within that short passage students can find excellent examples of varying sentence structure and length, vivid vocabulary, onomatopoeia, and tone.

After finding the elements present in their excerpts, the students then reflect and write on how they added to the overall impact of the writing. This is key for students to make the connection of how using stylistic elements really enhance writing. In these reflections, I often see students comment on how the elements made the story more engaging, causing the experience to really come to life.

By using an excerpt from Laurie Halse Anderson's writing in my classroom, I am able to provide students an excellent example of compelling narrative, providing an authentic way to learn about effective elements of style they can use in their own writing. Using *Speak* in my classroom as a model text has given my students the “key” to unlocking the potential of their own narratives. As a result, the narrative writing that I now receive from my students is a well-crafted reflection of their own voices and experiences.