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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



NW REGIONAL NCTE CONFERENCE

Leading the Way

March 1–3, 2014 ~ Portland
PORTLAND MARRIOTT DOWNTOWN



CAROL JAGO

Distinguished English Teacher, Author, Editor,
Columnist, Speaker, Past President of National
Council of Teachers of English

“Close Reading: Teaching for Deeper Learning”

JACK BERCKEMEYER

Motivational Speaker with Humor, Hope, Energy, and Expertise,
Past Assistant Director of National Middle School Association

“Teaching—Living It, Loving It, and Laughing about It”



Message from the President

Hello, fellow ELA educators. What a privilege it is for me to serve as your president. I doubt our profession has ever been more challenging, yet day after day, you—my friends and colleagues—keep sharing your passion for literacy. You inspire me.

In November I attended the Boston NCTE conference. As always, I returned with renewed energy, new teaching ideas, and many books for my reading list. Though few of you could attend, please note that you can have just as rich an experience right here in Portland, March 1–3, when **OCTE hosts the NW Regional NCTE Conference** at the Waterfront Marriott hotel.

Plan now to attend; you truly don't want to miss this rare opportunity. We have inspirational, **nationally known keynote speakers, 180 presenters from 22 states and Canada** (all levels—early childhood through college), and more than **30 authors**. Co-sponsors include seven state affiliates, the Portland Reading Council, the Oregon Association of School Libraries, Friends of William Stafford, Rethinking Schools, and the Oregon Council for the Social Studies. And, we will celebrate **OCTE's centennial year**. Don't miss the fun.

The Marriott has made this an affordable experience by offering **excellent guest room rates**. Conference registration options are many; I recommend the **VIP package**—two days of the conference, the full-day post-conference institute of your choice, and the author luncheons. **See you in March!**

Remember: Together we are stronger.

Karen K. Johnson, President—Twality Middle School, Tigard



TEACHER GRANTS AWARDED

OCTE is pleased to give four grants this year to an elementary, a K–8, a middle school, and a high school teacher, each in the amount of \$250. Grants are awarded based on the proposal, its objectives, and the demonstrated need. (For more information on grants, see <http://www.octe.org/grant-opportunities.html>)



Lynette Gottlieb is using her grant as an enrichment opportunity for 12 struggling readers (grades 5–7) at Ashbrook Independent School in Corvallis. Looking at last year’s CTBS scores for reading, these students scored considerably below the class median, and it is these students “whom I want to expose to the joys of reading graphic novels in hope that it will improve their attitude about reading as well as advance their skills,” writes Lynette.

The money will buy two copies of 15 titles recommended by the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC), among them *Houdini: The Handcuff King*, *Ghostopolis*, *Lewis and Clark*, and *The Three Thieves*.

Included in the project will be a trip to the Corvallis-Benton County Library to talk to a children’s librarian who specializes in graphic novels and who will explain the trends in the genre. Students will form a reading club and meet weekly in the school library to read, exchange books, journal, and give “book talks” to each other. They will also write a review of a title of choice on a laminated bookmark to be included in the book when it is added to the school library’s shelves.

Lynette will be presenting on this project at the OCTE conference on October 4 at Wilsonville High School.

Shawna Allen, Learning Specialist at Ridgewood Elementary School, Beaverton, works with 49 special education students in a summer academy program with Tualatin Hills Parks & Recreation Department (THPRD), and she will use the money to purchase literacy materials aligned to Common Core Standards.

She plans to buy graphic novels, early readers, short story collections, and parenting books and plans to place them in the resource library at school for easy and independent access at any time. “My overall goal is to continue a model we have in our school already that focuses on strengthening the relationship between the school and home,” declares Shawna. During the six weeks of the academy, she will devote time to book talks and “ways to engage children and parents in school/learning and sharing of knowledge.” One of her objectives is to “empower parents and connect them with other parents to build capacity and support networks.”



Ali Kretschmer teaches 7th–8th grade English and Reading Intervention at La Grande Middle School. Even though the school’s reading scores improved by 5 percent on the state achievement test, IEP and ELL students showed that they had great difficulties in reading poetry and free verse, and in understanding figurative language.

Ali designed a “novels in verse” project to improve scores on the poetry selections found on statewide assessments. She will introduce quatrains, ballads, epitaphs, including free verse, and sample free-verse novels. In a poetry writers’ workshop, students will practice writing structured poems, and demonstrate their learning in a “storytelling in verse” lesson.

The OCTE grant will be used to buy multiple copies of a dozen books, including *Almost Forever* (Maria Testa), *Love that Dog* (Sharon Creech), *Make Lemonade* (Virginia Euwer Wolff), and *Shakespeare Bats Cleanup* (Ron Koertge).



Justin Gabor teaches 9th grade at Gervais High School, a school with 75 percent free and reduced lunch and many ELL students. Even with these odds stacked against them, “our students are truly amazing young people who work hard and strive to succeed when life is overwhelming outside the doors of our school,” writes Justin. Gervais High was named a Breakthrough School by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

With his grant, Justin plans to purchase Ray Bradbury’s 1953 *Fahrenheit 451* “as a connection piece to themes of oppression in society.” His objective is “to tie in contemporary with classic literature to build engagement, rigor, and relevance,” since his school is implementing CCS and allows for alternative measures of novel studies. His goal is to “engage students in finding real world connections” to literature, while examining literature as social commentary.

Students will demonstrate learning by creating an individual project of a dystopian society to be shown and presented at a gallery walk at the end of the unit. Justin will share his project at the OCTE conference on October 4 at Wilsonville High School.



EDITOR'S Letter

Colleagues,

One of the delights of belonging to OCTE is how wonderfully we get fed by others' ideas. On the verge of hosting the Northwest Regional Conference, I realize that once again I have stolen ideas from my OCTE comrades to better the language arts methods class I teach each fall.



Shelly Buchanan and Maureen Milton have been presenting on independent inquiry projects for several years now at OCTE conferences, and I have jumped at the opportunity to join their sessions to see student work and listen to their approach to organizing and motivating students for them. Whether students research and present on earthquakes or milkshakes, South Africa or ball peen hammers, the quality of the work is stellar.

Independent inquiry is at the core of learning for life. Too often, society, schools and their agents, us teachers, define the realm of what counts for learning. Students are not seen as experts. What if students are challenged to become experts? What if we show belief in their inherent skills to understand a subject and teach us? What changes in their sense of self as they independently investigate the world around them?

In my methods classes, I have always put a premium upon choice and have had my students do many choice-based assignments that I used as a high school English teacher. However, I have never fashioned a class in which individual interests became the center of our learning. I wondered: Could we hit all of the important aspects of English teaching? Would there be cohesion to the course? Would exploring our individual passions work to inspire all of us? This year I chose to find out. I proposed a Personal English Inquiry.

For this inquiry project, students could pick any topic that would help them become better English teachers. They could create a unit. They could focus on a theme. They could focus on a topic: poetry, grammar, essay writing, short stories... They needed to read at least one professional book, find both hard copy and internet materials, create activities, and present to the class. No straight lecture. Multi-media: music, visuals, film. Students spent at least twenty hours researching and preparing the 30–45 minute presentation and accompanying annotated bibliography to be distributed to everyone in the class.

Students began their journeys, homing in as they deepened their investigations. By the second half of the term when 2/3 of class time was devoted to presentations, the topics ranged from teaching vocabulary to kinesthetic learning in a language arts classroom, from teaching

30TH ANNUAL Oregon Writing Festival

Saturday, May 3, 2014

Portland State University
<http://www.octe.org/oregon-writing-festival.html>

Avi's *Nothing but the Truth* to the impact of the natural world on human society, from teaching writing like Nancy Atwell or Donald Graves to teaching the 5 paragraph essay. Presenters were passionate, clear about their philosophical and practical underpinnings, and full of ideas that could be generalized beyond their particular focus. TED talks were ubiquitous as were other Youtube videos. Visual metaphors abounded, but so did verbal explanations. We feasted not only on the shared materials, but on each other's beliefs and styles.

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS *Oregon English Journal*, Spring 2014

We invite you to submit articles and practical teaching ideas devoted to:

“Working with Reluctant Readers and Writers”

Manuscript submission deadline: February 1, 2014
Visit <http://www.octe.org/ocej-call-for-manuscripts.html>

Each of us became teachers of teachers—colleagues sharing a love of our chosen vocation.

Of course, I had begun skeptical of this potpourri doing the job. Happily my students appreciated the breadth, depth, and student-centeredness of the inquiries. I am excited about building on this year's success. And I thank Shelly and Maureen for sparking me. How many ideas will you take away on the weekend of March 1st? Which ones will you share with us in this newsletter? I hope many!

Peter Thacker, *Chalkboard* Editor

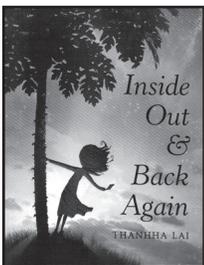
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STUDENT BOOK REVIEW

OCTE Spring Newsletter

Submission deadline: Feb. 1, 2014
<http://www.octe.org/chalkboard.html>

Stuart Levy, librarian/teacher at Inza R. Wood Middle School in Wilsonville submitted this student review of an Oregon Readers' Choice Award book. We are honored to have Dale's review of a compelling story that has garnered national awards as well.



Review of *Inside Out and Back Again*

by Thanhha Lai

(Upper Elementary Division Award Winner)

This was a really good book. The simplicity of the poems describing Ha's life really leaves the reader lots of room for imagination, but also gives a deep look into Ha's thoughts and feelings. Ha says, "Sometimes I would prefer war in Saigon over peacetime in Alabama." Was she sad because of bullies or because of the feeling of being too stupid? I was really glad for her when her brother started teaching her fighting lessons and when her neighbor started to teach her English.

Reviewer: Dale