

Highlights

November 2011



of the Minnesota Reading Association, an International Reading Association affiliate



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MRA Mission

The Minnesota Reading Association actively promotes lifelong literacy for all citizens. We encourage professional interaction among all organizations involved with literacy and provide resources for exemplary literacy practices and habits.

It's the Law

Presidents Column

Three times last week, I ran up against the "It's the Law" rhetoric in school meetings. I'm sure you have heard it too. Someone in the meeting wants to establish how important it is to implement these given changes and so they remind us that "it's the law." In all three cases, I wasn't against the changes, but I became a little flustered with the continual emphasis on teaching a particular way because it was the law. I've never felt like I've been in violation of so many laws by just entering the classroom.

On the other hand, I understand why the phrase is constantly invoked. Teachers are to understand the importance of adding or changing their programs, and the most efficient means of doing so is to simply remind them, "Well, it's the law." This rhetoric has a consequence. Our jobs have become just a little more intensified. The choices we make within our classrooms have more import because the consequences of making the wrong ones have legal ramifications, or perhaps financial.

And when the stakes are that high, it changes not only the way we view our classrooms and what happens there, but how we view our students. So as we begin our new year, we must remind ourselves of what makes our schools and classrooms strong. No matter how busy and overwhelmed we might feel as teachers, our days should begin by putting the students first. Building a sense of community within the classroom is fundamental to all of the other things we hope to accomplish throughout the course of the day. Sousa (2001) points out that creating community is essential to the learning environment. He also states that "learning occurs more easily in environments free from threat or intimidation." (61)

Whether we are teaching in primary, secondary, or post secondary, the rules are the same. Students learn when they feel safe and comfortable, when they believe that the teachers care about them as people, and when they feel as though they can be themselves. In the first month of school, I have found Bonnie Davis' "How to Teach People Who Don't Look Like Me" to be especially helpful in establishing community. She offers a theoretical background for her ideas, current research that supports those beliefs, and some very practical ideas for the classroom.

Like me, I hope that you are able to find access to meaningful educational outlets in this time of intensification. Surrounding ourselves with others who face similar challenges can be especially helpful. And that's where an MRA membership becomes quite useful. In just the opening weeks of school, the Secondary Reading Interest Council, Twin Cities Area Reading Council, Central Minnesota Reading Council, and the Southwest Reading Council have had events. The Southeast council held a successful event in August,



Scott Voss, President

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Cory Stai

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NEWSLETTER LAYOUT Winding Oak

Opinions expressed are those of the author and are not necessarily those of:

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Reading Councils

Arrowhead Reading Council

contact Terry Betlewski
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Catching Up

Another year is off and running for Arrowhead Reading Council. Duluth's Poet Laureate, Sheila Packa, was at Teatro Zuccone on Sunday, October 2. Other programming is in place and our plan for continuing to receive the Honor Council Award from International Reading Association is in the works.

Our board now has representatives from the surrounding area including Cloquet, Duluth's Edison Charter School, and Superior WI. New people + new ideas = continual growth and success.

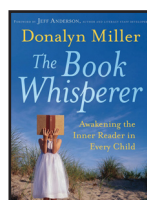
Have you read *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller?

We both have and are challenging our students to read a

specific number of books this year. Both of us have set a personal book goal and we challenge you to read her book and set your own reading goal.

Arrowhead Reading Council has provided both of us with experiences that we would not have been able to achieve without their support. Not only being a member, but serving on the board is a rewarding endeavor. Consider your own personal growth by becoming a member of one of the most successful councils in the state.

—Terry Betlewski and
Michelle Bowker, co-presidents



Minnesota Academy of Reading

Contact: Amy Smith
afsmith@stthomas.edu

Policy Issues in Literacy

JANUARY 2012

Location to be Announced

The second annual "Policy Issues in Literacy: Implications for Teacher Educators" event, sponsored by the Minnesota Academy of Reading will be held during January, 2012. Last year approximately 70 reading professionals and teacher education faculty gathered for this event which featured presentations and round table discussions on important issues such as the Teacher Performance Assessment, Common Core Standards, and implementation of the new MN Reading Standards. Details regarding the location, time, and topics for this event are coming soon.

Southeast Minnesota Reading Council

contact Maurina Rome
mrome@mnreading.org

Literacy Blitz

NOVEMBER 17, 2011, 4:30 to 6:30 pm

Pinewood Elementary School

Rochester, MN

Think of a "speed dating" scenario where educators move from table to table to talk about topics and issues they are most passionate about!

JOIN SERC on November 17th from 4:30-6:30 in the Media Center at Pinewood Elementary, 1900 Pinewood Road SE, Rochester, to share ideas, gain insight and enjoy lively conversations about current issues and topics in literacy and education. Each table will have a facilitator who will have a few resources to share, with the majority of the conversation coming from participants! This event

Reading Councils (cont'd)

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is FREE for SERC members, \$5 for non-members. Refreshments will be served. Two hours of CEUs will be earned. Box lunches will also be available.

Topics will include:

1. Writing
2. Spelling
3. Common Core Standards
4. Flex Grouping
5. Daily Five\Cafe
6. Relicensure Requirements (changes are coming for renewal)
7. Response to Intervention
8. What have you been reading lately and "Potpourri"
— whatever is on your mind related to literacy!

For more information please contact Maurina at m.rome@mnreading.org

Maud Hart Lovelace

Erika Try is eager to share information about the Maud Hart Lovelace program. A very enthusiastic group of avid readers (aka Rochester area teachers) meet regularly to share insights and discussion about contenders for this highly regarded literary distinction. If you are interested in learning more about the Maud Hart Lovelace program, please contact Erica at ertry@rochester.k12.mn.us.

SERC Membership Update!

Southeast Reading Council membership is on the rise! We have almost 50 members and are excited to welcome our newest members who joined in August: Sharon Davis, Heidi Haugen, Renee Hildebrandt, Jessica Denter, Lori Mack, Dawn Shuster, Sara Stenhaus.

Southwest Minnesota Reading Council

contact Dr. Cindy Whaley
email whaleyce@mlc-wels.edu

Fall Conference Summary

Our fall conference was held on Thursday, September 29 in Bingham Lake, Minnesota, and featured local author Renee McCuen.



Renee McCuen

Renee has enjoyed working with children as an elementary school teacher for 34 years. Her favorite subject is science. Just like in her stories, her students learned to never say, "Gross," or, "Ick." Instead they would say, "Interesting," because everything in the world is indeed interesting.

We have creatures big and small living in our neighborhoods and sometimes even in our houses. Renee hopes Danny & Ester's Fortunate Adventures will help you to learn about some of these creatures and to be curious about the others you see.

Renee lives in Worthington, Minnesota, with her husband, Bob, who buys her microscopes and rocks, and listens to all of her "interesting" facts. Renee has used her 34 years of teaching experience to write a book entitled *Amazing Ants*. Her love of science is seen through this story!

Discover author and illustrator Peter H. Reynolds!

by Beth Wolf, member of the Southwest Minnesota Reading Council

Wow! He is one of those authors who can write a book for readers of all ages. His books are great for

reading aloud in the classroom and will spark deep thought with independent reading. Plan on reading some of his books to begin your writing workshop.

- Ish* — "relax"
The Dot — "make your mark"
he North Star — "diverge"
So Few of Me — "enjoy downtime"
Rose's Garden — "sharing"

Day-to-Day Assessment in the Reading Workshop: Making Informed Instructional Decisions in Grades 3-6.

Franki Sibberson and Karen Szymusiak.
Scholastic, 2008. 208 pages

This is an outstanding book that reminds us that the purpose of assessment is to build knowledge about our students. It includes all the tools needed to run reading workshop using day-to-day assessment to inform instructional decisions. It provides a model, including how to set up reading workshop during the first six weeks, and subsequent chapters detailing how to use assessment during all the components; independent reading, read-aloud, whole-class instruction: mini-lessons, small-group instruction, individual conferences and share time. Throughout the book we learn how to use interviews, observations, notebooks, and other authentic tools to get to know each of our students as individual readers and learners. We are provided with the tools to help all kinds of readers, from those struggling below grade level to those soaring ahead. This book is a great complement to The CAFÉ Book by Boushey and Moser.

Reading Councils (cont'd)

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It's a wonderful reading workshop resource!!

(Reviewed by Barb Polzin, member of the Southwest Minnesota Reading Council)

SKYPE and Reading!

Take your love of literature and share it across the country! Read to grandchildren, nieces, nephews and others across the miles using the technology of SKYPE. What a wonderful way to spread the love of books with others! To quote the grandchild of a fellow teacher, "I love when you read to me, Nana!"

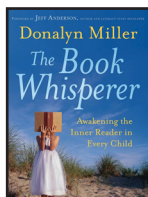
Twin Cities Reading Council

contact Neva Stoebner
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Discussing *The Book Whisperer*

NOVEMBER 15, 2011, 5:30 TO 7:30 PM

Custom Education Solutions
11480 Marketplace Drive N
Champlin, MN



Have you been hearing a lot of great things about this book? Want to hear the buzz? Denise Retka is hosting a TCARC event at Custom Education Solutions. Come and hear about *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller.

Bring along a favorite book to share with the group. The book can be one that you read aloud to your class, one that your students are loving and/or one that has caught your eye! Wine and cheese will be provided by Denise. RSVP to nstoebner@delano.k12.mn.us. Hope to see you on Tuesday, November 15th!

Submit event details to Maurina Rome by January 15, 2012, in order to have your information included in the upcoming issue of our *Highlights* newsletter. m.rome@mnreading.org

2011 MRA Conference a Success



A roomful of educators at the Minnesota Reading Association's 2011 Annual Conference. We learned together, shared ideas, and took new methods and strategies back to our classrooms. Let's do it again next year!



Conference organizers Jessica Crooker and Jen McCarty Plucker posed for a photo with speaker Jim Burke and MRA President Scott Voss.

The best thing about being a teacher is that it matters. The hardest thing about being a teacher is that it matters every day.

— Todd Whitaker

The Secondary Scene

I met with a reading teacher at a local high school last week to help her learn how to use data to place students into her English class for struggling readers. Unfortunately, the meeting was convened because on the first day of school, there was only one student on her roster. Although she works in a high-performing high school, I was quite sure there was more than one struggling sophomore reader wandering the halls.

As we were starting the meeting, a new student, who had just been added to the class, wandered into the room. The student, who I'll call Callie, had shoulder length blond-and-hot-pink hair—probably not her natural colors. As her eyes, heavily outlined in black, scanned the room of mostly adults, she thought there clearly must be a mistake on her schedule.

The teacher explained this was an English/Reading course and asked Callie if she had any idea how she had been placed here.

Callie shrugged her shoulders and said, "No."

So, the teacher pressed on and asked Callie what kind of grades she received in English last year.

Callie smirked and said, "I failed English."

Next, the teacher asked Callie if she's ever had difficulty reading.

"I can read just fine," was her response.

I couldn't resist. I have heard these identical responses many, many times, so I asked Callie about her other classes last year and what kinds of grades she received in those classes. She smiled.

"I don't really DO school. I'm just not motivated to do my work."

BINGO. I can tell you with complete certainty, 'I don't do school' is code for 'I tried, but I failed so many times that I just gave up. It's easier to

fail because I'm not trying, than to fail because I did try.'

Since we were planning a data dig during the meeting anyhow, I looked up Callie's history of standardized reading assessments. As a 7th grader, she was reading at an appropriate level for her age. However, on the same assessment a year later, her score remained exactly the same, which now meant that she was falling about a year behind her peers.

I said to Callie, "Let me guess, it was sometime during 8th grade when you decided to 'not do school' anymore. Am I right?"

She laughed and said, "Yep!"

I knew it. Callie's situation and responses are SO typical of struggling readers: "I don't do school," "I'm just not a good test-taker," "I didn't really try on that test," "I wasn't feeling well that day."

Unfortunately, a lot of adults buy these stories from kids and then shrug their shoulders. And I get it! It's easier to accept a reason that is out of our control or realm of responsibility, than to talk with students about their poor reading histories that cannot be chalked up to a bad test day and proceed to DO something to help those students grow as readers.

But, we have to. We have to intervene and provide the support students need to develop skills they will use for the rest of their lives no matter what occupation they pursue.

By the way, there were 60 struggling readers in the sophomore class. Not just one.

Jessica Crooker, Literacy Coach, North View Junior High, Brooklyn Park; Vice President, Minnesota Reading Association.
jessica.crooker@district196.org



BEST BLOGS

1. A passion for teaching and opinions, from a California Social Science High School Teacher: ukiahcoachbrown.blogspot.com/
2. Free resources and lesson plans for teaching with technology: www.freetech4teachers.com
3. This Week in Education by Andrew Russo: <http://scholasticadministrator.typepad.com/thisweekineducation/>

Remarkable Reading Sites

1. Rhyming word activities—great site for teaching phonemic awareness: <http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/patti/k-1/activities/phonemic.html>
2. Chapter books to read aloud—extensive list of terrific titles worth checking out: www.kinderkornet.com/readalouds.html
3. Comprehension rubric developed by Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA): www.mrsmcgowan.com/reading/rubrics.htm#Comprehension
4. Reading Strategies: summarizing, note taking, using graphic organizers: <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/links.html>
5. Overview, ideas, and reproducibles for Lit Circles, Reading Buddies, Reader's Workshop: <http://home.att.net/~teaching/litlessons.htm>

Musings of a Mentor

Teaching is tough. If you want to do it well I do not believe it can ever be an 8:00 am to 4:00 pm job. Yet despite the never-ending lesson planning, paperwork, meetings, and room organizing, I still thank my lucky stars that I am able to do something that I love. When those eager students of mine enter the room so excited to tell me something about their night, or show me a note or drawing they have made just for me, or ask when will it be writing time because they want to work on their "book," I know all the pressure, frustration and even the heartache is worth it.

I am mentoring a first year teacher this year. Laura has three years of experience as a long-term sub, and as a preschool teacher, but this is her first year in an elementary classroom. I often wonder how she gets through the day when I think about how overwhelmed I feel with several decades of teaching experience under my belt. We are expected to meet once a week but we touch base daily, often during our common prep time. As a new teacher, Laura is learning the Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies standards and curriculum. She is creating lesson plans, figuring out how to use the online attendance and student data programs, and is participating in the "Sunshine Committee." She is also collaborating with colleagues as we implement a push-in model for ELL, Title, and SPED, and she is part of a Professional Learning Community that meets weekly. Teaching is not a job for the faint of heart. It calls for being versatile, having stamina, and knowing that what you do matters. Most importantly, in my opinion, teaching requires a sincere love of children that will help you overcome all of the aforementioned challenges.

Despite all of the things piled up on her plate, one of the most troubling

struggles Laura seems to be facing is what to do about Jenny, a girl who won't participate in any group activities and refuses to eat her snack every day. My first piece of advice: go talk to the previous year teacher to see if Jenny had similar issues last year. Laura reports back "Nope, no problems like that last year, everything was fine." Next, I suggested that she talk to our school social worker about getting Jenny involved with something we offer called "friendship lunches,"



where the social worker meets once a week during lunch with a group of girls from the same grade level to socialize, play games, talk, and basically learn how to be and make a friend. Laura calls Jenny's mom to get permission and the mom declines the offer, stating that she doesn't think her daughter really needs to see a social worker. The problems continue with the student refusing to participate in most academic or social activities in the classroom. What to do next? We discuss the possibility of childhood depression. Laura tries to have a heart-to-heart with Jenny, gently asking if there is something bothering her. No response from the girl. She is simply not willing to open up and reveal anything about what is going

on in her young mind. Laura calls the mom again, expressing true concern about Jenny's absolute refusal to participate or eat snack at school. The mom again shrugs off the concern explaining that Jenny heads straight for the fridge after school and she really isn't concerned. She goes on to say that maybe the problem is that Jenny hasn't adjusted to Laura yet and that is probably because she is a first-year teacher. Laura isn't sure how to respond to this, she is hesitant to disagree with the mother, so she thanks her for her time and promises to keep working with Jenny.

This situation is an example of what we don't learn in our teacher education classes in college. There is nothing to prepare a new teacher for such a dilemma. There are no teacher evaluations or test scores that will reflect the amount of time, concern, and effort that is put into trying to solve this issue and make life better for this little girl. Yet it is one of the most troubling concerns for a young teacher like Laura, one who cares deeply about her students and wants them to feel safe and happy in her classroom as much as she wants them to learn and grow. Those of us who really "get it" know that although we may be teachers of reading, math, science or social studies, our most essential job is to be teachers of children.

Back to the drawing board, my search continues for words of wisdom and sound advice about how to help Jenny. I remind Laura to document everything that has happened so far, to keep track of the phone calls to mom and the facts from those conversations. I also suggest that Laura arrange

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Legislation: Reading Well by Third Grade

Reading well by third grade is one of many developmental milestones in a child's educational experience. Literacy development starts at an early age and is the basis for all academic success. Reading well by grade three ensures that a student has a solid foundation of literacy skills to continue to expand their understandings of what they read, make meaning, and transfer that learning across all subject areas. Instruction that provides the basis for all students to read well by third grade and beyond will help close the achievement gap and ensure that all students are ready for the demands of college and the workplace. From cradle to career, a sustained effort to create quality literacy environments in all of our schools and programs from birth through grade 12 promotes academic success.

We know that reading instruction in the early grades goes well beyond decoding and memorizing sight words. Reading is about making meaning. Learning to read and reading to learn happen simultaneously and need sustained

and strategic instruction from preschool through middle school. This year's education bill contains many provisions rooted in giving all students a solid foundation in early literacy development. Essentially a rewrite of existing statute 120B.12, this bill requires that ALL students be provided with comprehensive scientific research-based instruction (SRBI). The definition of scientifically based reading instruction in statute is consistent with the findings of the National Reading Panel Report in 2000. Since that time schools have embraced 'the pillars' of SRBI, and noted that there are other instructional considerations needed in order to help students be strategic, lifelong readers and thinkers. To adequately impact the achievement gap, several key elements of aligned practice are necessary, and also referenced in the bill. Schools must notify parents of student progress at least annually for all students, and must give parents of students not reading at or above grade level in K-3 timely information including reading assessments administered, services available, and

strategies parents can use at home to support their student. How are you already supporting parents to better understand the needs of the reading

expectations for your grade level?

Additionally, for students identified as not reading at or above grade level, a school needs to implement intervention evidence-based practices to meet the needs of learners and accelerate their growth toward grade level expectations. Assessment methods and data points used to determine grade level reading proficiency must be reported to the Commissioner annually beginning next school year. The first report needs to be submitted by June 1, 2012. As stated in the education bill, districts must provide sufficient training for all licensed staff to improve reading instruction, and provide regular training and support so that elementary teachers can implement components of comprehensive, scientifically-based reading instruction, recognize students' diverse needs in cross-cultural settings and serve the oral language and linguistic needs of ELL students. What professional development already exists in your district? What else is needed?

Taking a systematic approach to ensuring all students read well by third grade and beyond is recommended. Focusing on preschool instruction, K-12 comprehensive literacy instruction that includes reading, writing, speaking, listening, and is explicitly tied to the 2010 English Language Arts Standards is



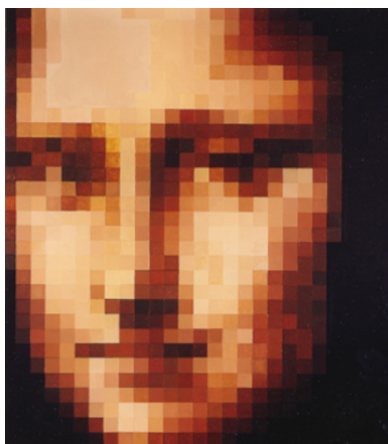
Kari Ross



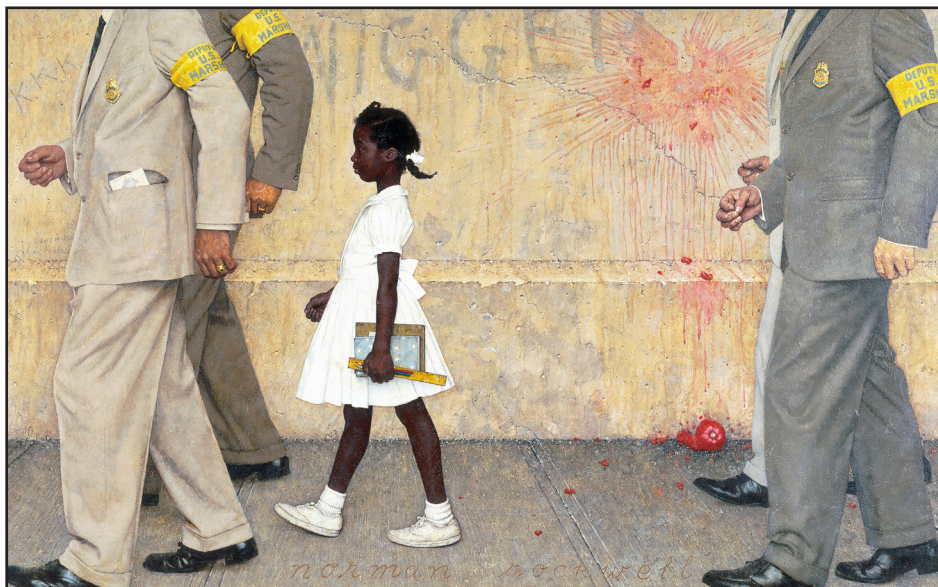
Reading Images

Digital affordances have enabled educators to make use of more visual elements within their classrooms. Recently, I have been experimenting with more of these visual activities to teach literacy lessons, and in this technology column I'd like to highlight three of those.

In talking with students about the reading process, I often emphasize that reading involves connecting new information to old information. In other words, by reading we gain information and make our understandings of the world around us a little more developed. I offered a visual representation of this by projecting a very pixelated version of the Mona Lisa (which you can find quite easily by Googling Mona Lisa and pixel).



I told students that they had probably seen versions of the Mona Lisa before, but they may not know much about the painting. After a little background on it, I then explained that this version of the painting was not very clear, just like when we sit down to read a biology or social studies textbook, or any new text. We might have general understandings of ideas or concepts, but they are not very



The Problem We All Live With, painted by Norman Rockwell

clear, focused or definite. Then, I show them a less pixelated version of the Mona Lisa and explain that it represents what happens when we read and comprehend material. Our minds are able to fill in more details, and the picture takes on more focus. Finally, I show them a clear version of the Mona Lisa and explain how it represents the experience of reading and understanding texts.

Another example of using visual texts included the photographic image of the workers taking a lunch break on a steel beam high above New York City. The picture, *Lunch Atop a Skyscraper*, was taken in 1932 during the construction of the RCA Building at the Rockefeller Center. Because I am terrified of heights, the picture makes me extremely uncomfortable. I tell students, I can't imagine having to wake up every morning to face my fear of heights in order to earn money for my family, like these men did. But for some of these workers, they had no choice. And I tell them that I realize that some students in the

room might have the same anxiety for reading as I do for heights, but that they have to face the challenges of this difficult task every day. So I tell them that I recognize this anxiety and that I will never ask them to "go out on a limb" unless I think it is absolutely necessary.

A third example uses the process of "reading a painting" as an analogy for how we go about reading a text. Students consider what needs to be done before reading, as they read, and after they read. They discuss how to find important details or features. They might consider how a viewer might use inference to make meaning of the scene. They can ask questions, make connections, predict, or evaluate it, much in the same way they would printed text.

Last month, Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With* received attention as President Obama hung it in the Oval Office. The ensuing debate over the painting's placement underscores how powerfully art can inspire,

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Reading the Rest (continued articles)

Reading Images

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communicate, inspire, and sometimes anger. Digital technologies have opened up many creative and meaningful opportunities to incorporate this powerful medium into our everyday literacy activities. Paintings, photographs, and sometimes sculptures have made their way into my classroom as I have started to look for visual ways to communicate my ideas. Doing so, allows me to not only express an idea or emotion, but to also expose students to important or iconic images that will be useful as cultural capital.

Scott Voss is a reading specialist at Apple Valley High School, Apple Valley, Minnesota, currently on sabbatical to work on a doctoral degree from the University of Minnesota in reading research. He is a Bush Foundation



Scott Voss

Fellow and the president of the Minnesota Reading Association. s.voss@mnreading.org

President's Letter

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just before school started. We also have a number of events coming up.

LiRN will kick off its new year of professional development on November 2nd, this time partnering with the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Center of Reading Research. Central Minnesota and the Minnesota Academy of Reading are sponsoring the Fall Symposium on "Unpacking the English Language Arts Standards," which will be

held on November 12th at the Sauk Rapids High School.

There is so much to gain from your membership with MRA. Not only does it provide access to some of the state's best professional development in literacy, but it also affords the chance to build community with a group of educators who are passionate about literacy. I hope to see you at one of our upcoming events. Until then, take care, and thank you for all that you do to promote literacy.

Resources

Davis, B. (2007). How to teach students who don't look like you: culturally relevant teaching strategies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Sousa, D. (2001). How the brain learns. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Scott Voss s.voss@mnreading.org

Musings of a Mentor

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to discuss Jenny's issues at a Child Study meeting where the behavior experts from our building will offer additional support and ideas. Finally, as we will begin some flex grouping between classrooms in the coming week, we decide to have Jenny and some of her classmates work with some students in my classroom for 30 minutes of our two-hour literacy block. Our hope is that my observations of Jenny in a different environment with a new group of peers might shed some light on her behavior.

As I reflect on my role as mentor, I think back to my opening statement: teaching is tough. So how do I encourage Laura and assure her that the rewards of teaching are plentiful despite

the obstacles and demands of the profession? I simply share my stories. These are my golden moment stories. The stories that make me smile. The stories that bring tears to my eyes. The stories I write down. The stories that convince me I have the best job in the world.

They include the one about the EBD kid who whispered in my ear "You are beautiful." There's the one about the little girl who, after I explain that the book I am reading aloud has been around since I was a child, a really long time, says to me "You're not that old," then she turns to her neighbor and asks quietly, "Do you think she's that old?" There's the one about the kid who hears me tell the class I am excited about going out of town to my college reunion and he asks if I will be gone for the whole weekend. When I say "YES!" he asks in a very serious voice, "Does your husband know about this?" There's the one about the little boy in a wheelchair who announced to the class

"Someday I will have legs that let me run because there are no wheelchairs in heaven." And then there's the one I might use as the inspiration for the title of my memoir as a teacher... about the six-year-old student who was facing major heart surgery. Before my visit to his home to drop off a care package from our class, his mom told him to go take a shower and clean up. He refused, stating very honestly, "Come on mom, it's not like the president is coming."

To all the veteran teachers who are reading this, please consider sharing your golden moment stories with those new teachers. They need to hear our stories. The experiences behind our stories are the reason we do what we do.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

MRA Annual Conference Reflection and Preview for 2012

I have a tendency to spend a lot of time preparing, fine tuning, and futzing with details up until the moment of a big event. This summer my MRA's event was the Annual Conference on August 11th, Together, Tuning in to the literacy needs of our students. After a year of planning with many hard working colleagues in MRA, the preparations and futzing proved successful. I also have a tendency to move on from big events and not look back. I know the value of reflection. I buy many cute journals with grandiose ideas for taking time each day to reflect. And yet, the journals remain blank. So today, I in the spirit of reflection, I pause to look back on our conference for just a moment before I forge ahead making preparations for next summer.

Preparing, Fine Tuning and Futzing

LOOKING BACK

So in the words of a few of our conference attendees:

- Excellent presenters – Kylene Beers, Bob Probst, and Jim Burke were entertaining, engaging, and I learned some new things I'll be able to try with my students.
- Well-organized, easy to maneuver within schedule.
- It was a great day. Loved the keynote speakers. It seems like the breakout session presenters would have had more attendees if they didn't have to compete with the keynote presenters who



Jim Burke was one of our excellent speakers.

- had a breakout session at the same time.
- The site was perfect; however, I felt like the amazing speakers were not given enough time to really get into the "good stuff." I felt like they were just able to scratch the surface of their outstanding work. That didn't give the audience much to chew on and bring back.
- Very good keynote presentations. Each one was insightful, enjoyable, and helpful. Conference arrangements seemed to run smoothly from registration table to lunch arrangements and closing. The conference theme was referenced well and utilized as a window into the importance of the work we do day in and day out.
- Great food! It is a treat to be served such awesome food at workshops.
- Wonderful conference! I was so thrilled to be able to hear Jim Burke, Kylene Beers, and Bob Probst. They were inspiring and inspiration keynote speakers!
- Lots of authentic choice in both vendors and sessions.
- Comfortable and warm venue, great food, good chairs, nice air temperature, good location
- Great learning and time for networking – have two new contacts to team with this year
- FUN door prizes
- Jim Burke was EXCELLENT and gave so many good ideas.
- I came away with some good ideas that I can use to start the school year.
- This was the best venue of the conferences I've attended. Great layout, comfortable spaces, displays and food/drinks.

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Looking Back, Looking Ahead (cont'd)

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- Fantastic keynote speakers — important authors that I was excited to meet
- "I thought it was a fantastic day! Great space. Great speakers. Great lunch.
- My only thought is that maybe we should not offer breakout sessions while our nationally known speakers are also presenting.
- The keynote speakers were entertaining as well as literacy leaders. The location was easy to get to and worked well. Food was great.



Kari Ross, from the Minnesota Department of Education, was one of our speakers.

- It is always so great to gather with my colleagues from around the state. But also good to have professional speakers from outside of the state to share their professional knowledge and experiences.
- Lots of valuable info and great food!

- Keynotes were excellent. I really appreciated them. The breakout session on the MN English/ Language Arts Standards was very informative.

LOOKING AHEAD

In looking back at the comments from the surveys attendees filled out, I am reminded of the power of reflection. When we pause, contemplate, and give careful consideration to past practice, we can truly refine for the future. I am reminded that reflection isn't just a great idea that I can take or leave, but is truly a necessity for continuous improvement. Based on the comments we received, the following arrangements have and are being made for the 2012 conference.

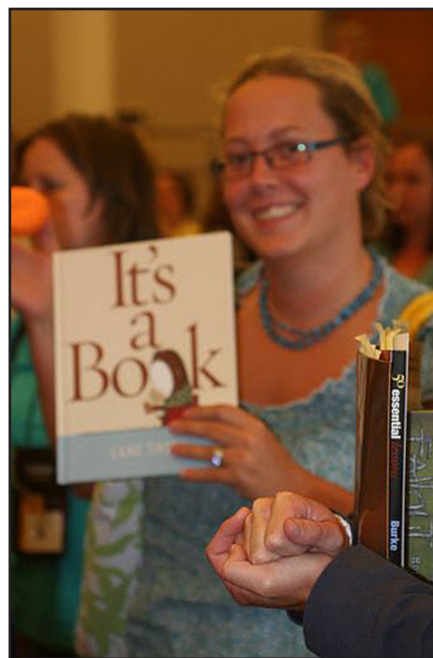
Next Conference August 9, 2012

SAME TIME, SAME PLACE

We'll again host our conference the day after the Minnesota Center for Reading Research offers theirs. Again it will be at the University of Minnesota Continuing Education Conference Center. It will again be the 2nd Thursday of August which is August 9, 2012. We will again have great food, great exhibitors, and great speakers.

The executive board is currently vetting national speakers for the conference and will announce them SOON! We hope to provide a focus to the conference that allows us to delve deep into a literacy challenge we all face. Stay tuned!

We will also work to give more time with the national speakers and not have our MRA literacy leaders compete with the national speakers for breakout audience members. If you have further ideas, please send them to me or Jessica Crooker (MRA VP and Conference Co-chair).



We look forward to planning another great event and hope to see even more of our MRA friends there next summer. Until then, I need to decide which cute journal to dust off so I can get reflecting — the red leather one with a heart on it, the jade colored suede covered one, or the one I got last year with books all over it?

Jen McCarty Plucker, Ed.D. Minnesota Reading Association President-Elect
jennifer.plucker@gmail.com

Don't Miss ...

Exemplary Reading Program

The Exemplary Reading Program Award is sponsored by the International Reading Association to recognize outstanding reading and language arts programs at all grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school). Its purpose is to call the public's attention to outstanding programs in schools throughout North America. Each participating state can choose one winning school.

The program has five objectives:

- (1) to improve literacy in our society,
- (2) to recognize school staffs who demonstrate excellence in reading and literacy programs,
- (3) to encourage the development and refinement of exemplary reading/language arts programs,
- (4) to report to the public noteworthy efforts to improve reading/language arts, and
- (5) to disseminate specific information about high-quality programs so that other professionals can use it to improve their own instructional efforts.

Last year, Minnesota Reading Association recognized Eastview High School in Apple Valley as the recipient of the award.

If you would like to nominate your school or district reading program, please contact Julie Scullen at j.scullen@mnreading.org for more information.

Applications are due November 1, 2011.

Opportunities for involvement!

Interested in becoming a literacy leader with MRA?

Join us for the Fall Leadership Council Meeting on November 12th from 12:30-4:00 in Sauk Rapids (Sauk Rapids High School, 1835 Osauka Rd. N.E., Sauk Rapids MN). We will meet at 12:30, but we encourage you to join us in the morning as well for our Fall Symposium sponsored by the Central Minnesota Reading Association and the Minnesota Academy of Reading. The symposium will focus on putting the new Language Arts Standards into Practice. Registration for the Fall Symposium is available on the MRA website (www.mnreading.org).

Writers Are Readers: Young Author Celebration 2012

The Minnesota Reading Association is again sponsoring a creative writing award for the K-12 students of our members. Students may submit an original manuscript (fiction or nonfiction) piece to be enjoyed by young readers. Winners will be recognized on the MRA website as well as at our Celebrate Literacy Reception on March 30, 2012. Students have the opportunity to showcase their creativity and enthusiasm for writing to entertain or inform other readers.

The writing submitted can be fiction or nonfiction from any genre (adventure, make-believe, poetry, prose, etc.) but some ideas include:

- a story about something that happened in the writer's family
- a biography of a famous person (including sources or references)
- a collection of original poems or song lyrics
- a news story about a historical event, written as if the writer

were a reporter witnessing the event

- a description of a life-changing event

Guidelines:

1. Writers must do their own work.
2. The audience for this writing will be other students.
3. While illustrations are acceptable, and for some genre encouraged, writers must keep in mind that all publishing will be done in black and white, so the use of color is discouraged.
4. Teachers may help students with the writing process, as this is a learning experience. Encourage rewriting and editing. Stories will be published as they were submitted.
5. Kindergarten and 1st grade students may dictate a story to an adult if the student's writing skills are still being developed.
6. Work may be entered in the modified category if the student is on an IEP for language arts.
7. Entries must be typed.
8. Entries will be judged according to creativity, originality, organization, and mechanics.
9. Judging will be done by grade level, according to these specifications:
 - a. K-3 around 500 words or less
 - b. 4-6 around 750 words or less
 - c. 7-9 around 1000 words or less
 - d. 10-12 1200 words or less
10. Winners from each category will be notified by mail, and will be invited to the MRA Celebrate Literacy Reception on March 30, 2012.

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Don't Miss ... (cont'd)

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11. Two copies of each manuscript should be mailed to:
Julie Scullen
Attn: Writers are Readers
MRA Celebrations Chairperson
1431 - 154th Lane NW
Andover, MN 55304
12. Deadline for entries is February 1, 2012.
13. Each page of the manuscript should be labeled on the back of each page with the following information:
 - a. Name of student
 - b. Grade
 - c. Teacher's name and MRA membership number
 - d. Phone number and/or email address of teacher
 - e. Full name and address of school

Recognize a Dedicated Literacy Leader for the Celebrate Literacy Award

The Celebrate Literacy Award recognizes organizations, institutions, and individuals that have made significant literacy contributions at the local, state, or provincial level. It is hoped that the celebration will familiarize the public with literacy activities in the community and call attention to the work that is being done by the schools, Minnesota Reading Association, and the International Reading Association to promote literacy worldwide.

Each year for the past five, MRA has proudly recognized the work of dedicated and e inspirational members.

Candidates who have shown exemplary accomplishments in any of the following areas may be suggested for consideration as Celebrate Literacy Award recipients:

- (1) direct teaching at any level,
- (2) organizing local literacy programs,
- (3) promoting support from the public relative to enhancing literacy,
- (4) producing teaching materials or special media for literacy programs,
- (5) conducting research in the field related to literacy,
- (6) conducting special surveys of importance for literacy planning,
- (7) providing young people the opportunity to help in literacy activities, and
- (8) conducting informal educational activities of a social, cultural, economic, or political nature in which literacy activities are included (radio and television programs, publications and press, library programs, and projects for special populations, such as the handicapped and the aged).

Please consider recognizing a colleague or peer in this way! Also, please be sure to SAVE THE DATE for "Celebrate Literacy 2012."

The event will take place on Friday, March 30th, at the Maple Grove Community Center.

Questions can be directed to Julie Scullen at j.scullen@mnreading.org

Deadline for applications will be February 1, 2012.

Legislation: Reading Well by Third Grade

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recommended. Meeting the needs of all students is no easy task. From preschool to graduation, and from the 0 to 100th percentile, our students have diverse needs. We all have shared responsibility for student achievement. Creating a continuum of supports that provides targeted instruction is essential and changes across the continuum. For students who are functioning below grade-level the supports are in addition to regular instruction. For students who are functioning above grade-level enrichment may be necessary. In the center of it all is quality core instruction. Sharing the responsibility includes collaboration among literacy leaders at all levels from the classroom to the capitol, creating a common understanding and supporting the great work that has already been started across our fine state. What can you do to support better literacy instruction in your school?

The Reading Well by Third Grade legislation is a great opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions about current and future reading and literacy instruction at all levels. I encourage you, as Minnesota's literacy leaders, to be involved in helping your district enhance or develop the required local literacy plan. Extend the conversation beyond third grade and continue to be positive role models for best practice reading instruction for all kids. Let's work together to ensure that all students are college and career ready.

Resource

2011 Education Bill:
<http://bit.ly/pBaRwn>

For more information contact: Kari Ross,
MDE Reading Specialist 651-582-8455
kari.d.ross@state.mn.us

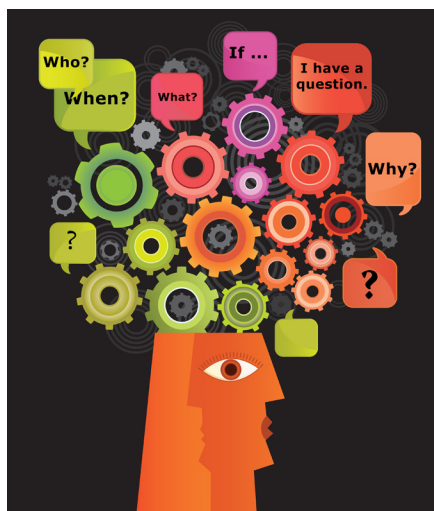
Once They Get It, You've Got 'Em

In *Engaging Adolescents in Reading*, Guthrie (2008) clearly illustrates that the goals students and instructors set related to reading have to foster intrinsic motivation. Students need to read for meaning and when they do, they comprehend and are engaged. Conversely, if we coerce students into reading through pop quizzes, study guides, or teacher-directed, whole-class discussion, students will read only for the score, the answer, or the hopes of giving an answer that pleases their instructor. Pink (2009) argues further that this environment based on external measures and instructor-created goals can lead to unethical behaviors including cheating, skimming and scanning (as a shortcut, not as an efficient review strategy), or outright defiance and disengagement.

We can increase motivation for our students by centering text instruction on metacognition. When students consciously think about their thinking and reflect as they read, they become acutely aware of their strengths and the areas in which their thoughts are getting them off task or confusing the comprehension. By teaching students to annotate text (write their thinking in the margin or on a Post-It® Note) and then to reflect on which thoughts lead to deeper reading and comprehension, students can negotiate the metacognition skills they should strengthen. It also gives them flexibility to use visualizing when painting a picture in their mind will clarify confusion, or to question the author when reading an editorial. Students begin to recognize that making their own predictions and hypotheses while they read scientific texts—and adjusting

those predictions as they go—truly does give them an insight into the discipline of science: making, testing, and adjusting hypotheses.

This strategy is especially beneficial in fostering an environment that embraces questioning. For example, if students are sent home with a reading assignment and reading guide, but are given permission



to record questions if they are unable to generate answers to the teacher-created questions, they are more likely to engage in the reading. Students feel comfortable recognizing when they get confused by the text or content and are rewarded with their questions when they come to class. By reducing the anxiety students feel when they don't "get it" the first time, we actually foster deep and repeated reading for knowledge acquisition.

My husband teaches 180 middle school students in the subject of American Studies. He has been working on engaging students in learning through an emphasis on metacognition and using literacy as the spine to hold all content together (Schmoker, 2011).

He was excited one day when he came home with 180 tests students had just taken. He had given students an opportunity to add value to their test by writing anything they wanted in the margins next to each question. One student had filled in his arrows for supply and demand but, for insurance in case he didn't get his arrows quite right, he also wanted to show his thinking. He wrote in the margin that he understood supply and demand from watching the Will Ferrell movie *Blades of Glory*. In the movie, Ferrell's character shares that he owns a rare comb made of whale bone. Because so few were made in the world, it was quite expensive. The supply was low so the demand was high. This student, incidentally a striving reader, through his value-added comments written all over his test, moved his final grade from a B to an A-. He was able to show that while he may have been confused by the way some questions were worded, he wanted his teacher to know that he did truly understand the content.

Resources

- Guthrie, J. T. (2008). *Engaging adolescents in reading*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Pink, D. (2009) *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York: Riverhead Books, member of Penguin Group, Inc.
- Schmoker, M. (2011). *Focus: Elevating the essentials to radically improve student learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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