

Highlights

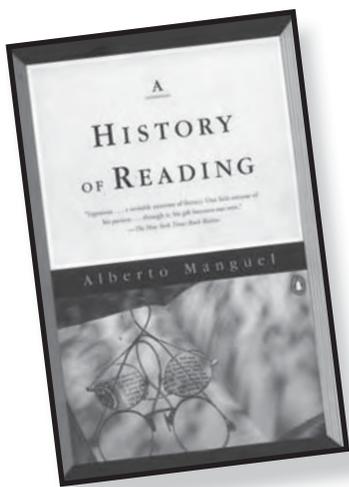
April 2010

of the Minnesota Reading Association, an International Reading Association affiliate



Celebrating Literacy

by Ilene Christian



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On Friday, March 19th, Minnesota Reading Association members from around the state gathered to Celebrate Literacy. It was an inspirational evening as students shared their award-winning writing, grants were awarded for worthy projects, a scholarship was given to a promising new education student, and awards were received by three individuals for their amazing contributions to the field of literacy (see articles elsewhere in the newsletter). It was a joyful evening and it reminded me that celebrating literacy is a satisfying use of our time.



Ilene Christian

We celebrate many things in our lives; birthdays, holidays, seasons. It just seems right to celebrate something that has such a major impact on our lives. Literacy enhances who we are. It brings us joy, understanding, challenges, experience and experiences, new worlds, support, relief, and new friends. I just finished reading *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett and I miss my daily connections with Minnie, a major character in the book. She was full of spunk but mindful of the effects her actions could have on her family.

As readers, we relate to Thomas Jefferson's oft-quoted statement, "I cannot live without books" though many of us might reword it to "I cannot live without my Kindle" or "I cannot live without my computer." The novelist Jamaica Kincaid, in explaining her theft of books from her childhood library noted, "that once I had read a book I couldn't bear to part with it." Our celebration of literacy is obvious in the piles of books on our nightstands that spill over onto the floor and the sturdy or not-so-sturdy shelves in our personal and professional lives that groan under the weight of "just two more."

A book I return to from time to time is *A History of Reading* by Alberto Manguel. Manguel's chapter headings are intriguing: The Silent Readers, The Missing First Page, The Shape of the Book, Forbidden Reading are a few. He shares with you, the reader, the quirky history of the written word; the love and the power of it all. Interesting tidbits: the first definite instance recorded in Western literature of silent reading occurred during the 4th century, a reference to the practices of Ambrose, a bishop in Milan; by the mid-sixteenth century, over eight million books were in print, responding to the demand and tastes of readers. We join a long history of celebrating literacy. And a special privilege for us, as members of the Minnesota Reading Association, is we bring this celebration to those in our lives, grandchildren, children, students, everyday!

Maurna and Vicki have again put together another thoughtful and informative edition of Highlights. Look for information on the August conference, technology, local council reports more. As the newsletter is one form of communication for MRA, we look forward to your future submissions about conferences you attend, great ideas from your classroom, or books you couldn't put down.

Happy reading (and writing)! *Ilene*

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NEWSLETTER EDITOR Maurna Rome

NEWSLETTER LAYOUT Vicki Palmquist

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Minnesota Reading Association

13570 Grove Drive #280

Maple Grove MN 55311-4400

www.mnreading.org

Reading Councils

Central Minnesota Reading Council

2010 AUTHOR DINNER
THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2010, 6:00 PM
SAUK RAPID-RICE MIDDLE SCHOOL
SAUK RAPIDS, MINNESOTA



Catherine Thimmesh

CMRC is honored to host Catherine Thimmesh at the April 8th, 2010 Author Dinner being held at the Sauk Rapid-Rice Middle School in Sauk Rapids. Catherine Thimmesh is the author of five nonfiction books including the Robert Sibert award-winning *Team Moon*. Her most recent publication is *Lucy Long Ago*, which details the discovery of the world's oldest known hominid with fascinating details about the process of the discovery. We are excited to connect students and adults to the research process and the connections to science in books.

The dinner begins at 6 p.m. with a meal catered by Mexican Village which will consist of a taco bar, cake, and beverages. Registration forms are available on the MRA website. E-mail sara.martini@isd742.org for more information or to register for the dinner.

Ballots for CMRC Nominations

Nominations for 2010-2011 will be sent in early April and will include:

President.....Sara Martini

Vice President.....Paulette Hauge

Secretary.....Mardi Knudson

Treasurer.....Susan Sartell

Membership.....Pat Hanson

Minnesota Academy of Reading

The purpose of the Minnesota Academy of Reading (MAR) is to bring together K-12 teachers and higher education professors to discuss and respond to reading practices and policies in the state.

MAR SPRING BANQUET
WED, APRIL 21, 2010, 5:00-8:30 PM
NORTHLAND INN, BROOKLYN PARK, MN



Dr. Maureen Prenn

During this year's banquet we will honor the accomplishments of Dr. Maureen Prenn from Minnesota State University in Mankato. The title of her presentation is "Challenges to Preparing Reading Teachers." Registration forms are available on the MRA website.

Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examinations (MTLE)

Effective September 1, 2010, Minnesota will no longer use Educational Testing Service (ETS) for teacher licensure examinations. Pre-service and in-service teachers will take the newly developed Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exams (MTLE) to acquire initial or additional teaching licenses.

New Reading Standards in Teacher Education Programs

On July 17, 2009, the Minnesota Board of Teaching adopted new reading licensure standards in the following licensure areas:

- Early Childhood and Elementary
- Content Specific (i.e. 5-12, K-12, 5-8, and 9-12 licensure areas)
- Teacher of Reading, K-12

... Reading Councils (cont'd)

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Across the state, institutions of higher education have been working to align their programs with the new reading standards.

Common Core State Standards

Public feedback on the Common Core State Standards was solicited during the month of March. The Minnesota Academy of Reading has been providing ongoing feedback on the Common Core Standards by participating in focus groups conducted by the Minnesota Department of Education and by submitting comments directly to the Common Core Standards development team. Drafts of the K-12 standards can be reviewed at www.corestandards.org.

Secondary Reading Interest Council

SRIC is proud to announce its 2010-2011 Executive Board!

► Dr. Jennifer McCarty Plucker and Kari Ross, Co-Presidents.

Jennifer is a recent recipient of the MRA Celebrate Literacy Award and works as a reading specialist at Eastview High School in Apple Valley. Kari serves as the Reading Specialist for the MN Department of Education.

► **Cory Stai, Vice President.** Cory is a reading teacher in the South St. Paul School district, and is currently coordinating a collaborative project between SRIC and MDE to update the Secondary Literacy Framework created several years ago.

► **Jessica Crooker, Secretary.** Jess is a teacher at Eastview High School in Apple Valley, and is participating in projects designed to motivate, and therefore increase the learning rate, of striving readers.

► Nancy Stalland, Treasurer.

Nancy is a Reading Specialist at Tartan High School in Oakdale, and has already served SRIC well as treasurer.

► Stephanie Brondani, Membership Director.

Stephanie is the Reading Specialist at Minnetonka High School and has been serving SRIC as Membership Director. She is currently involved in designing two new reading courses at Minnetonka High School, one of which will target 9th and 10th grade students whose content area reading skills are underdeveloped, and the other for 11th and 12th graders who have not yet passed the MCA reading test.

► Julie Scullen, Past President.

Julie is a Reading Intervention Specialist in Anoka-Hennepin and will be serving as MRA President for the 2010-2011 school year.

Southwest Minnesota Reading Council

Fall Conference Update

At our fall conference, we were honored to have author Brenda Ehrmantraut as our guest speaker. She shared ideas for involving parents with their children's reading. If you were unable to attend, check out Brenda's website: www.bubblegumpress.net.

**SWMRC SPRING CONFERENCE
TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 2010
MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE
NEW ULM, MINNESOTA
AUTHOR – TIM KEHOE**

Tim Kehoe is the inventor of numerous products, including the world's first colored bubbles, Zubbles. In 2005, Zubbles was awarded *Popular Science's* Grand Prize for Innovation.



Named one of America's 100 Best by *Reader's Digest*, Tim has been featured in *Fortune Small Business*, *Business Journal*,

Entrepreneur, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, *Popular Science*, *Believer* and also made appearances on National Public Radio, Discovery Channel, NBC, CBS, and NY1.

Tim recently finished the first book in his new series *The Unusual Mind of Vincent Shadow* which was featured in *Publishers Weekly* and selected



as one of the "Pick of the Lists" choices at the Midwest Booksellers Association Fall Trade Show. Visit www.VincentShadow.com for more information. This book, published in a unique format with an inventor's guide inside the back cover, is sure to ignite an excitement for science, invention and READING!

- 4:00 – 5:30 Vendors
- 4:30 – 5:30..... Registration
- 5:00 – 5:30..... Book Sales/Signing
- 5:30 – 6:15..... Dinner
- 6:15 – 6:30 Book Share
- 6:30 – 6:45..... Business Meeting
- 6:45 – 8:00..... Tim Kehoe

SWMRC's Link to China

Abby Nesseth, a 2002 JCC graduate, has become SWMRC's link to China. Abby is teaching English for her second year. Her summer teaching experience will be in a rural school in the Anhui province

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... Reading Councils (cont'd)

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this April. She will travel with Thomas Stader, the founder of "The Library Project." She emailed that she will get a better idea of the need and how our group's funds may be best utilized. Abby provided this Internet link so that we may better see what "The Library Project" is all about: www.library-project.org

Literacy Interventions Beyond RTI (Response to Intervention)

THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2010
8:30 AM – 3:00 PM
PRAIRIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
1700 1ST AVENUE, WORTHINGTON, MN
\$50 SWMRC MEMBERS, \$60 NON-MEMBERS
NO REFUNDS AFTER JUNE 3

8:30 – 9:00 Coffee, tea, juice, rolls
 9:00 – 12:00 Workshop
 12:00 – 1:00 Lunch (included)
 1:00 – 3:00 Workshop

Send your registration information to Yvonne Sieve, 617 Dugdale Avenue, Worthington, MN 56187. Call her at 507-372-2543 or 507-727-1250 if you have questions.

Dr. Cindy Whaley, a professor of education at Martin Luther College and a member of the SWMRC

Executive Board, will present a variety of literacy interventions that can be used in any classroom setting by the classroom teacher. The term "literacy interventions" would mean not only reading interventions complementary to RTI, but also interventions for the other components in a balanced language arts curriculum such as writing, spelling, and grammar. As Cindy states, "Modeling by the presenter and active participation by those in attendance will be two requirements during our enjoyable day of learning together."



Dr. Cindy Whaley



Advocacy and Legislation

The "Advocacy & Legislation" page under "Resources" at www.mnreading.org will provide resources to keep you informed and equip you with necessary advocacy tools. Advocacy as an MRA member is necessary and vital to keeping our legislators and district decision-makers aware of the proven research available that informs what we do in our classrooms. On this page, you'll find an Education Advocacy Self-assessment to determine your advocacy readiness as well as an updated advocacy manual published by IRA in 2009. The manual provides the how-to's of contacting your legislator, as well

as sample letters. It also explains the process of how a bill becomes a law. You'll find a presentation shared with the MRA leadership team in November 2009, describing legislative efforts in which we participated in 2008-09 and what to look for in future months.

The Minnesota Legislative session reconvened on February 4th with over 50 proposed bills related to education working their way through committees. To keep tabs on these proposed bills you can receive e-notifications of house and senate committee work by visiting: house.leg.state.mn.us/leg/billslogin.asp.

You will be asked to register and then sent to a "My Bills" page to select for which bills you'd like to receive updates. A tip: you can request to sort the proposed bills by category, such as education. You can also choose to receive updates on specific representative and senator activity.

Should you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to email me, Eva Boehm, your MRA advocacy chair, at eboehm@mnreading.org.

Please visit this page frequently for legislative updates. It looks to be another busy session in St. Paul.

A Generational Project Comes to a Close

by Kristen Thomas, 2009 MRA Grant Award Winner

If you can imagine excited second graders, beaming seniors, sticky doughnut fingers, and lots of hugs, you will have a glimpse of what the third trip to The Villages was like for Mrs. Thomas' second grade students from Sunrise River School. On Tuesday, February 23rd, Mrs. Thomas' class, accompanied by classroom volunteers, made their final trip to the senior living complex as part of a grant that was funded through the Minnesota Reading Association.

From October to February, the students made three visits to The Villages of North Branch to interview seniors about their lives and collect important information

One of the other copies was taken home and one was donated to a local dentist, doctor's office, or the North Branch library, all of whom accepted the children's writing with enthusiasm. The donation of books to the various sites in North Branch was just one component of the grant which

Mrs. Thomas hoped would allow her students to see their writing

used in purposeful ways throughout their community.

The project was a huge success! The students formed friendships with seniors living at The Villages and they learned valuable information about these amazing people who have



Students displayed their books, for which they were both authors and illustrators. Stop by the North Branch Public Library to read one of these thoughtful, well-researched books.

been part of the community for almost a century. The second graders also had a focused writing project that they could put their full effort into. The seniors enjoyed the second grader's energy and, with each visit, a youthful spirit could be felt in the air.

A special thank you to Pam Dolin, activities director, and the staff at The Villages of North Branch for helping this project come to fruition.



Students read out loud from the books they had created from interviews they conducted with seniors at The Villages.

about their likes and dislikes for a writing project. Between visits, students followed the writing process and wrote draft stories about the information they collected from their special senior friend. They revised, edited, and sketched illustrations before beginning their final book copies. In the end, students wrote three duplicate stories and gave one to their seniors on their final trip to The Villages on February 23rd.

Kristen Thomas received a 2009 Minnesota Reading Association grant to assist with this project. Turn to page 7 to read about the 2010 grant recipients.

How about your next reading or writing project? Could it benefit from an MRA grant? Apply online for the 2011 grant program.



A big plus from the writing project ... friendships formed!

MRA Executive Board Enjoys "Books and Breakfast"

On February 6th, the MRA Exec Board members joined 300 other reading enthusiasts and more than 30 talented authors and illustrators from Minnesota and surrounding states to celebrate books!

The CLN Books & Breakfast event is held each year. It's a wonderful opportunity to meet and network with an incredible group of literacy advocates. In 2011, the event will be held on Saturday, February 5th, at the Radisson Hotel in Plymouth, MN.

by Maurna Rome

CLN will also be holding the 2011 Bookology (books for readers in grades 6 through 10), with authors and booktalks, on Saturday, February 26th, at the Radisson in Plymouth.

For information on the Children's Literature Network, please visit their website at clnetwork.org. If you'd like an invitation to either or both of these book events in 2011, sign up at clnetwork.org/2010Breakfast (books and authors for grades K-6) or clnetwork.org/2011Bookology (books and authors for grades 6-10).

During this year's "Books & Breakfast," one of MRA's favorite Minnesota authors, Debra Frasier, shared her new book, *A Fabulous Fair Alphabet*. This is a picture book of twenty-six letters and words that follow the arc of a day at the state fair. Debra Frasier's ingenious collages offer both a state fair scrapbook and inspiration to find your own fabulous fair alphabet. "Find Your Fabulous Fair Alphabet" is a family word game you can play while strolling the state fair. Be sure to visit debrafrasier.com.

Sarah Rutledge (back row, second from right) and Kristen Thomas (front row, right) sat at author Eileen Beha's table, discussing Eileen's book, *Tango: the Tale of an Island Dog*. ▼



◀ Debra Frasier talked about her new state fair alphabet book, *A Fabulous Fair Alphabet*, and the opportunity for families to collect vocabulary words at the State Fair.

Ilene Christian (front row, second from left), MRA President, sat next to author and illustrator Karen Ritz (front row, second from right), talking about *Windows with Birds*. ▼



MRA at CLN's BOOKS & BREAKFAST



▲ Mary Ann Johnson (back row, second from left), MRA's new Treasurer, and Neva Stoebner (back row, third from left), MRA's outgoing Treasurer, sat with the group at author Loretta Ellsworth's table, talking about cellular memory and *In a Heartbeat*.



◀ President-Elect Julie Scullen (back row, second from right) sat at author John Coy's (front row, middle) table, where they talked about his new sports-themed book, *Eyes on the Goal*.

MRA Grants Announced

Two grants were awarded by the Minnesota Reading Association to worthy projects from across the state. Stevan Waddell, a middle school English teacher from Milaca, received a grant for his project "Boys' Breakfast Book Club." As part of his project, Stevan intends to highlight the literacy practices of numerous men in the community to provide strong male role models for his students. Look for updates on his project in an upcoming newsletter or future MRA conference.

Molly Ring, Michell Yotter, and Maurna Rome received a grant for their project "Cultivating Collaboration between Teachers, Professional Authors, and Young Authors." This project will bring together 12 Minnesota Reading Association members from the Southeast Council, their students, and two well-known Minnesota authors for a morning of writing. Teachers, authors, and students will work together on an original piece, culminating with a "work in progress" share time. Stay tuned for news about their collaboration!

Our next round of grant applications will be due February 1st, 2011. Start thinking now about a worthwhile project idea you might want to submit!

The 1st Karen Lamb Johnson Memorial Scholarship is Awarded!

At the Celebrate Literacy reception on March 19th, Katie Johnson received the first Karen Lamb Johnson Memorial Scholarship. Katie is the daughter of Kevin and MRA member Mary Johnson. Katie is majoring in Music Education with an instrumental concentration. In her application Katie stated, "I have participated in band and music throughout my education and want to teach and share my love of music and learning with students. I was inspired to do this by the great music teachers that I have had since I was in elementary



▲ Kevin, Katie, and Mary Johnson were on hand when Katie accepted the first Karen Lamb Johnson Memorial Scholarship.

school." Katie also noted, "I feel that it is important for students to study music and the arts because it helps strengthen their learning in reading, math, and other content areas." We are excited that Katie will be joining the profession!

This scholarship honors the memory of Karen Lamb Johnson, a lifelong supporter of literacy in Minnesota. Karen was an active member of the Minnesota Academy of Reading and the Twin Cities Area Reading Council.

Super Summer Celebration

South East Reading Council (SERC) invites all southern MN educators to a *Super Summer Celebration* kickoff!

Make plans to join us on Tuesday, June 8th, from 4:30-6:30 p.m. at Godfather's Pizza in Rochester, MN.

The event will include \$1 bargain books and a short presentation on excellent educator websites. All who attend are asked to bring a favorite book (professional or personal) to talk about.

Cost is just \$5 for MRA members and \$10 for non-members.

We will be sharing information about the SERC "Cultivating Collaboration" grant opportunity.

Email Maurna at mrome@mnreading.org to RSVP or for more information.



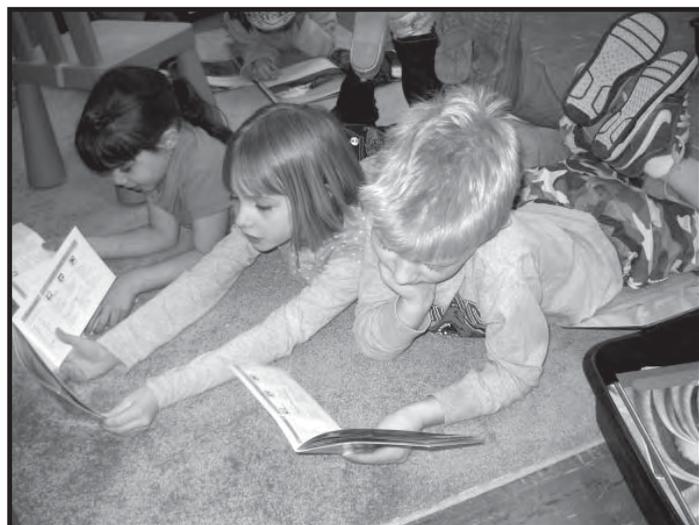
BIG FOX, Informational Text

by Maurna Rome

B	Bold: List any words or phrases that are in bold print.
I	Italics: List any words or phrases that are in italics.
G	Graphics: Describe any graphics (photos, drawings, graphs, charts, maps, tables, etc.).
F	Facts: List at least 3-5 facts you can find in the book or passage.
O	Opinions: List any opinions you can find.
X	X marks the spot—or at least the main point. In 2-3 sentences, write the main point of the book or passage. (Hint: read the topic sentence of each paragraph.)

“In the Information Age the importance of being able to read and write informational texts critically and well cannot be overstated. Informational literacy is central to success, in schooling, the workplace and the community.”

Nell Duke, Michigan State University



Why Read Informational Text?

- We are in an information age
- 96% of our websites are expository text!
- The majority of reading and writing that adults do is informational/expository
- Academic achievement in a wide range of subjects depends in part on a prior knowledge base.

The importance of reading *lots* of informational text with students of all ages cannot be stressed enough, as so eloquently put by Nell Duke (one of the keynote presenters at this year’s MRA annual conference).

As I work with primary-aged students, helping them learn to read while they also read to learn is a central goal of my literacy instruction.

Learning about concepts of print in informational text is also critical. The acronym BIG FOX has helped me with this endeavor! The letters stand for Bold, Italics, Graphics, Facts, Opinions and “X” marks the spot for the main point of the text. Using this mnemonic device has helped my students utilize informational text in a user-friendly way. Even first

graders are able to use the simple template to jot down examples of each text feature. Older students can elaborate more and may also find the easy-to-remember acronym a good way to organize responses to this important type of text.

Recipe for Informational Literacy

- Measure 2 heaping cups of curiosity
- Add 1 caring teacher
- Stir gently with interesting information
- Allow to steep in student generated questions
- Blend in time to read and write
- Sprinkle generously with think-alouds, reading strategies and craft lessons for informational writing
- Add a dash of hands-on experience
- Mix thoroughly with small group instruction and assessment
- Whisk in a rich mix of tools for gaining meaning
- Simmer in an atmosphere where information is celebrated all day
- Spread over a lifetime of reading and writing

Linda Hoyt, Make It Real: Strategies for Success with Informational Text

Celebrating Literacy

This year's Celebrate Literacy Dessert Reception was a rousing success. Attendees enjoyed wonderful desserts and beverages, browsed the dollar book sale, and participated in a silent auction.

The festivities began with recognition of eleven student authors ranging in age from kindergarten to eighth grade. As their teachers stood alongside them on the stage, students read their Writers are Readers submissions to the delight of the audience, and were then awarded certificates and bookstore gift certificates. Proud parents and family members took picture after picture of this proud moment.

MRA President Ilene Christian recognized Karen Lamb Johnson Memorial Scholarship winner Katie Johnson, as well as MRA grant winners Stevan Waddell (Boys' Breakfast Book Club) and Molly Ring, Michele Yotter, and Maurna Rome (Cultivating Collaboration).

Each of the three Celebrate Literacy nominees was introduced to the audience through a video created by their council. Afterward, each was recognized again as their nominator spoke on their behalf. Unfortunately, Gertie Geck was unable to attend the reception. The 2010 nominees were:

- Aino Husen
- Gertie Geck
- Jennifer McCarty Plucker

All three nominees were recognized with an engraved plaque—and many rounds of applause—for their work. To view the nominations submitted for each nominee, visit the MRA website.

The reception was a wonderful event celebrating the work of literacy advocates and student authors around the state. The only flaw in the evening was that there weren't hundreds of people in the audience to celebrate with us.

Please look for details about next year's Celebrate Literacy reception and make plans to join us for this exciting event in 2011!



Three of the eleven students who were honored at the Celebrate Literacy Dessert Reception for their Writers are Readers submissions.



Aino Husen (left) and Jennifer McCarty Plucker (right) chat after they are recognized for their work on behalf of literacy.



Four of our members, including Kari Ross (second from left) and Neva Stoebner (second from right), enjoyed each other's company.

Laptops in Education

by Scott Voss

For the past two months I have spent a good deal of time studying laptop initiatives in schools. I am intrigued by how they are set up, what they have to offer, and whether they are worth the price. There are a few noteworthy examples where laptops have been distributed to large numbers of students—namely in Maine and Texas. A number of private schools have also been able to raise funds or require students to have laptops of their own in class.

In the back of my head, I have always dreamed of this scenario. I imagined the opportunity to live in a classroom without walls, where we would be able to take tours of distant lands on Google Earth one day, and then partake in an Arctic trek the next. We would be able to communicate with a class in China, or create a digital reader's theatre of our favorite poetry, the next. Watch protesters outside the Senate or students marching in Iran.

The freedom to assign a reading as a Word document, a PDF, or a hyperlink. We would eliminate the need to send in printing requests days in advance. Students would have more agency and freedom to explore, they would have more diverse formats for writing (wikis, blogs, micro-blogs, emails, Google docs), they would have multiple ways to present their thoughts (video, audio, graphic organizers), and they would have the means to share their work with a broader audience. By the way, in looking at that list, one might observe that all of those things can be accomplished without digital technology. I would be foolish to think that these new technologies do anything inherently different or better than what has been done before. However, for a tech-savvy teacher, they make all of those processes (writing, collaboration, information access, dynamic presentations, communication) considerably easier.

Though I personally find laptop technology to be very promising, I was surprised to find that there is no evidence that shows it improves test scores (Warschauer, 2006). A number of studies have looked at standardized math and reading test scores of laptop and non-laptop students and they generally show little to no difference between the two groups. However, when other variables are considered, a different portrait emerges. Laptop classrooms/schools have greater attendance, fewer discipline problems, more engagement, better communication, and, surprisingly, a substantial change in the way teachers teach (Bebell & Kay, 2010; Russell, Bebell, & Higgins, 2004).

Generally, when teachers realized that everyone had access to a computer, they began to do things differently. Taking notes became more interactive as teachers started to post their material online. There were more opportunities for students to work together on projects within the class. Researching topics became considerably easier. It was possible to have students pair up and go online for a quick search. By their own admission, as indicated in one recent study, they found themselves teaching in significantly different ways (Bebell & Kay, 2010).

Recently, I have had the chance to observe a laptop classroom and I noticed how just having the technology available began to change things in subtle ways. For example, the teacher decided that since students had the machines, she should also use one. She posted her readings, notes, study guides, and PowerPoints online. She started to use her class website on a more frequent basis. She began to collect



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... Laptops in Education (cont'd)

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essays and study guides digitally, and she would insert comments on the assignments digitally and send them back. For the most part, her classroom seemed to look the same. She was at the front, giving a lecture. Students were at their desks taking notes and asking questions. From time to time, they would be directed to work together on a prompt, and they would quietly work together, crafting a response on their laptops and then read them to the class. Once again, these types of things did not change the general structure of her classroom.

Some teachers fear that the machines will be a tremendous distraction in the classroom. However, that simply has not been the case. Within this classroom, students were on task and focused. Expectations were that they would

be taking notes, or online only if given permission to do so, and I simply did not see students take advantage of that. Studies seem to support this. In general, laptops should increase engagement within the classroom. Additionally, the bigger concern with teachers these days is the laptop's nemesis—the smart phone—which can do essentially the same thing but more discreetly.

Though the test scores have not substantiated the full potential of laptops, I do believe that they will play an increasingly bigger role in our classrooms. In one survey, nearly half of all districts nationwide stated that they were likely to purchase a computing device for each student in their district by 2011 (Hayes, 2006). Though that is unlikely, it does indicate the strong push to give every child adequate digital access.

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MRA's Newest Officers

Mary Johnson – Treasurer

Mary is a member of IRA, MRA, and TCARC. She has served on the MRA executive committee and leadership team during the past year and is thrilled to serve MRA as treasurer. Mary is a Reading Recovery teacher at Lincoln Elementary School for the Arts in Anoka in the Anoka-Hennepin School District. She is in her 26th year of teaching and has taught in public and private schools as an elementary classroom teacher, Title 1 Teacher, and Reading Recovery teacher. She received her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education K-6 from St. Cloud State University and her master's degree in Reading K-12 from the University of St. Thomas. Mary lives in Andover with her husband and

three children. She enjoys reading for pleasure and school, volunteering at a library, researching genealogy, and gardening.

Cindy Blagg – Membership

Cindy started her teaching career over 30 years ago as a Special Education teacher. Teaching at-risk students to read has been her mission, passion, and joy! She is currently working as a Reading Recovery teacher in the Anoka-Hennepin School District. Cindy was the Reading First Literacy Coordinator at Wilson Elementary in Anoka, Minnesota for four years, from 2005-2009. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from St. Cloud State University, Master of Education degree from St. Mary's University and Reading Specialist

license from Hamline University. Cindy's main interest is READING!

Jennifer McCarty Plucker – Vice President

Jennifer is a Reading Specialist at Eastview High School in Apple Valley, District 196 and was recently recognized as a Minnesota Reading Association Celebrate Literacy award winner. She has collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Education, the Secondary Reading Interest Council, Winona State, and the Striving Readers cohort in District 196. Jen's biggest impact on the faculty and students at Eastview High School has been her work with striving readers. She has helped administrators and teachers become more aware of assessment data and how to interpret reading scores.

Conference Update ... MRA in August

by Scott Voss

Work on the 2010 MRA Conference (August 12th at Apple Valley High School) has accelerated in the last month, and it is shaping into a pretty exciting day for anyone who has the opportunity to attend. In this column, I would like to take just a few moments to share with you some of our latest developments and attractions.

First, if you have not seen the announcement on the MRA website, a conference hotel has been arranged. It is the Grand Stay Apple Valley, just a few miles from the conference site, which is Apple Valley High School. For \$89.90 a night, conventioners will get a suite, which includes a kitchenette, pool and hot tub access, free wireless, and complimentary gourmet express breakfasts. For those of you who might be thinking about whether to bring your family or not, we are just 15 minutes south of the Mall of America and the Waterpark of America. The hotel is also just a few miles away from Apple Valley's very own outdoor

water park, the Family Aquatic Center (which has everything from zero depth entry to waterslides to a lazy river, and of course a full pool). Apple Valley is also home of the Minnesota Zoo, which has lots of various summer programs available for the family. Of course, we are also just 30 minutes away from Mystic Lake or Canterbury Downs if you would like to enjoy the night life in the area.

Second, we have been accepting proposals for presentations. Though the presentation line-up has not been determined yet, we can promise a wide variety of sessions, ranging from early literacy to professional development. A number of presentations will address classroom practice, some will deal with technology, and we are hoping that a few will focus on race, culture and literacy. We are also hoping to attract an educational psychologist who will present and offer CEUs for the mental health certification on our state teaching licenses.

Finally, I have had the chance to interview both of our keynote speakers over the course of the last two weeks. Within the upcoming months, you can catch excerpts of those interviews on the MRA monthly podcast, which is available at mnreading.org. Once again, our theme for the year is "Engage and Envision," and it captures the changing role that literacy and texts play in the lives of our students as they experience the world in a different way from what we did in school. Dr. Aaron Doering (University of Minnesota) will focus on the transformational potential of integrating technology into the classroom, while Dr. Nell Duke (Michigan State University) will focus on visual comprehension and some of the work that she has been doing within that field.

We hope you keep the date open — Thursday, August 12th — and join us. It will be a day of celebration, networking, professional growth, sharing, and rejuvenation!

Literacy Leader Network

by Kari Ross, MN Department of Education

The Minnesota Reading Association (MRA) and Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) created a joint venture in September 2009 to provide networking opportunities to district-level and school-wide literacy leaders in their work to developing literacy programs based on research-based best practices. Throughout the course of the 2009-2010 school year, more than 60 K-12 literacy leaders from all across the state came together to learn from each other and share in professional development activities designed

to support the creation and maintenance of sustainable literacy programs that meet the needs of all students in our schools. The network also focused, in part, on studying the following professional resources:

- *Systems for change in literacy education: A guide for professional development* by Lyons and Pinnell, 2001
- *Best practices for literacy instruction*, 3rd Edition by Gambrell, Morrow, Pressley, and Guthrie, 2007

- *Our iceberg is melting* by Kotter, 2006

Feedback collected from participants at the last meeting of the year indicated an interest in continuing the group, or expanding the group to include administrators, content area teachers, and other educators. MRA and MDE will explore all available options to further this initiative and continue to work collaboratively to meet the needs of literacy leaders in Minnesota. For more information about the Literacy Leader Network, please contact Kari Ross at kari.d.ross@state.mn.us.



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.

Membership News

by Cindy Blagg, Director of Membership

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Kristen Thomas for serving as Director of Membership the past two years. Kristen put many hours into pulling reports off the online database, organizing member information, creating spreadsheets, and sending this information monthly to each council. She also created membership packets for both new and renewing members with pertinent information. Thank you, Kristen, for making it easy for me to take on the duties you have executed so efficiently. I hope I can do the job as well as you have done.

As Director of Membership I would like to encourage all members to become more involved in MRA and our local councils. Please talk with your colleagues and invite them to upcoming council events this spring and to the MRA conference in August.

I am honored to serve as your membership director. Please contact me with any questions you may have. You can reach me at c.blagg@mnreading.org



Reminder

Please make sure that you have updated your profile on the website with addresses (mail and email) and telephone numbers. We want to keep you “in the loop” on all upcoming events.