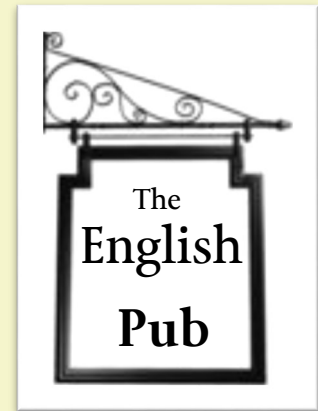


# The English Pub: ACTELA Newsletter

Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts



## Letter from the President

ACTELA Board members were recently asked to consider the following writing prompt:

*Spring seems to be coming early to Arkansas this year. What signs of Persephone's return inspire you most, and how will you celebrate this year's bloom of nature with your students?*

Some of their answers are highlighted on page two. Let us know if you have additional ideas for celebrating spring in your classrooms.

Dear ACTELA Members,

The end of the school year is swiftly approaching as well as testing time, so spring is a juxtaposition of the relief and anxiousness we all know too well. This year, there is a sense of uneasiness in the education world and changes soon to come. While much of this is out of our control, what we can control is our own spirit and the lessons we teach on a daily basis. Teachers, by nature, have that innate need to help others, to make things better: students, other teachers, our community,

and our schools. We are fierce fighters for our kids and our classrooms.

Take that fierceness into your classroom in this time of change and uneasiness. Use it to guide new teachers, to uplift experienced teachers, to raise expectations for us all. Just use it! It is your super power.



*Cindy Green, ACTELA President*

*"We all have the capacity to be a superhero. In order to become one, you just have to find your unique power or ability and exploit it for the greater good. The cape and mask are optional accessories, but a kind heart is essential." Robert Clancy*

### Inside this issue:

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## Choose your connections!

Visit our website: [www.actela.weebly.com](http://www.actela.weebly.com)

Email our editor: [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)

Or Friend us on Facebook:  
Arkansas Council of Teachers of  
English Language Arts



# Board Replies

- ⇒ I think it's a good opportunity to write using figurative language and teach students how to write about nature and weather. I could have specific goals and tasks and give that to the students. *Cindy Green*
- ⇒ Nature stories, as well as life in general, provide us constant paradoxes. The plot of Persephone, that she lives half her life in darkness and shadow and the other half in light and beauty—and both with equal force and involvement—is a model that we can do the same. *Dixie Keyes*
- ⇒ I really enjoy teaching a Transcendentalism unit in my American literature classes in the spring. We're able to have class outside while we read Emerson and Thoreau. Students really enjoy this opportunity to slow down the pace of life and take in the beauty of nature as spring approaches. *Jessica Herring*
- ⇒ Spring means preparations for travel to me. I'm gathering titles for my students to read about Cornwall and Wales and Scotland. We're getting together passports and making plans for what we'll pack. We're making lists of the books we hope to find on our trip to bring home and add to our own collections. You should come with us! Information about our class is on page ten. In the middle of all the busy work, I'm trying to make sure I pause to smell the wisteria in bloom before summer arrives. *Kay Walter*
- ⇒ Spring is a time of transition for me. The flowers begin to grow and blossom. Since I am a family oriented person, family time grows exceedingly during the spring; with family reunions and big cookouts. In kindergarten, we talk the about Seasons & Weather. We will discuss the characteristics of spring through various read aloud, literacy work stations, science/social studies, writing, and art. Also, during the spring, it becomes a bitter-sweet moment. The children will start preparing for graduation, when kindergarten finally comes to an end. Taking a look back on the first day makes us super happy and overjoyed to realize how much he/she has grown. For the students as well as for teachers, spring is a time of transition. *Brycial Williams*



**Spring flowers bloom in Sheffield Park Garden.**

# Graduate Students in English Conference: Finding our Way to Fayetteville

by **Dr. Kay J. Walter**

University of Arkansas at Monticello

Conferences are important opportunities for professional enrichment. We all enjoy time away from our classrooms and the cares of home to gather with colleagues and make new friends, to share ideas and challenges, to hear about the benefits of best practices in action, and to glean new understandings. Conferencing is not reserved for practicing professionals, though. Aspiring professionals too have conferences. When a former student sent me an announcement about the Fourth Annual Graduate Students in English Conference at the University of Arkansas, I was excited to hear that aspiring professionals in English and Language Arts pro-

grams would gather to share their research. The theme of this year's conference was Adaptations and Appropriations, and that seemed like a very approachable topic for my undergraduate students.

My upper level classes in British literature all include experiential learning components. Students are expected not only to do research in a specific topic but to share their findings in a public forum. In fall semesters, my scholars present in the preservice roundtables at ACC, but spring students must search harder to find a venue for sharing the results of their research with a wid-



Caleb Hayes, Dr. Kay Walter, and Ana Rodriguez-Mesa drove to Fayetteville to take part in the 4th Annual Graduate Students in English conference this month.

er audience.

My university hosts a Research and Scholarship Forum that is interdisciplinary, but while this opportunity to make a poster presentation is a good way of promoting student endeavors, it hardly inspires the excitement of an ACTELA adventure at ACC. Part of the fun of conferencing is getting away. We've been on the lookout for other possibilities, and this conference seemed nearly-ideal.

Except that they weren't graduate students. Two of my students had very clever ideas about exploring the motivations and implications of John Ruskin's characterization in recent movies and the gains and losses inherent in a transformation of Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* into a video game. These seemed like conference-worthy ideas to me. They had never written an abstract, so our first lessons were in how to envision the entirety of a paper yet unwritten so as to describe it clearly and convincingly in 300 words.

They knew how to write outlines, but this task differs from writing an outline. An outline can be merely words or phrases. It is meant to be simply a reminder of the order in which to arrange points in a discussion. Its purpose is to demonstrate the shape of a completed piece of writing—not to justify its creation. An abstract, on the other hand, must entice a reader's attention. It must motivate interest, create a vision of the whole, suggest authority of perspective, and clarify a thesis.

Our first adventure was writing and editing these abstracts. I shared abstracts from my recent conference presentations as models. We discussed their strengths and shortcomings, and my students wrote drafts. We took a class period



Ana presents her research on Kipling and the video game he inspired.

to share them and edit in groups before they made final submissions.

Conference instructions told them to send their abstracts along with contact information and to indicate the name of their school and their program. “Program? What should we say?” They asked me nervously. “Let’s just skip that part for now and see if the conference organizers like the ideas in the abstracts” was my response.

That weekend I got very excited emails from both my students. Their abstracts were accepted! They had a week at this point to draft a paper, develop a presentation, practice it, and make arrangements for travel to Fayetteville. “It can be done,” I assured them. “You get busy writing, and I’ll worry about the details.” At this point I stopped the dean in the hallway and confessed to him that we’d written abstracts for a conference I hadn’t warned him to allocate money for. I couched it in the good news that my sophomore literature students had been accepted to make presentations at a conference for graduate students.

He was pleased, of course, that our students had developed research interests that were worthy of presentation alongside those of graduate-level scholars. I promised to drive them to Fayetteville myself and not to incur any expenses other than mileage if he would approve the travel, and he did. That meant I would buy lunch for us all out of pocket, but that seemed like a small donation in a worthy cause. Meanwhile my students were bringing me their expanding ideas—first outlines, then notes, drafts that grew daily, and finally coherent sensible arguments.

We met multiple times each day, between classes and around other responsibilities, and talked of conferences presentations I’d made as a young scholar. We prepared



Caleb presents his view of Ruskin’s fictional portrayals in recent films.

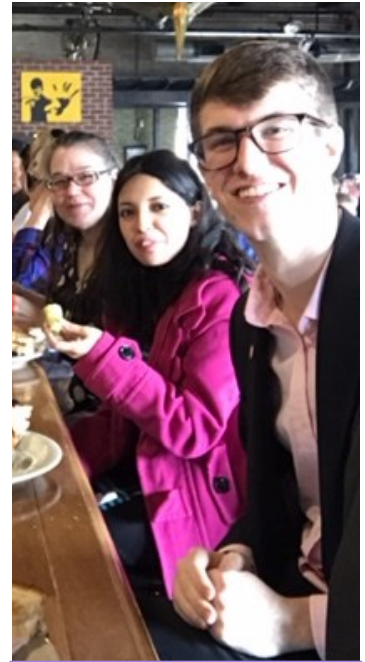
for questions, imagining what audience members might ask in response to their presentations and developing replies to illuminate key points. We practiced answering questions we didn't understand, questions that stretched beyond the scope of their assignments, and questions that required a knowledge base they have yet to gain. We answered email inquiries from conference organizers about their programs of study, and we finally admitted to their current undergraduate standing. The conference arrangers were surprised but still welcomed their attendance. My students indicated that I would be accompanying them, and I was contacted by the conference officials and included in the welcome. And my scholars kept writing.

As they were completing their composition, we began rehearsing the presentations. We noted parts of their papers which could be read directly from the page and marked them. We discovered parts which would have to be discussed more conversationally and made notes to guide the talks. We contacted Stuart Eagles for suggestions and received enthusiastic hurrahs and advice from him and from other Companions of the Guild of St George. At last, we packed our bags.

The five-hour drive came at the end of a long week of hard work, but it scurried by quickly. We presented ourselves at the conference registration and made eager introductions to our fellow conference goers. The advance conference schedule we'd received told us that one of my students was scheduled to speak in the opening session and the other would speak after lunch, but we were surprised when we discovered the details of the day. Caleb was not only in the opening session, he was scheduled to be the first speaker of the day! Even this didn't rattle my troopers.

All the hard work he had put in paid off as Caleb calmly and professionally began reading his paper. His presentation proved interesting, poised, and substantive. It was clearly a practiced and professional talk of equal caliber with the other, more mature speakers in his session. After lunch, Ana too made a presentation which was polished and thought-provoking. Their pride in themselves and in one another was obvious, and their effect on the atmosphere of the conference was clear. The conference officials shook hands with me and invited me to bring students again next year. My own pride in being their instructor threatened to burst buttons from my suit.

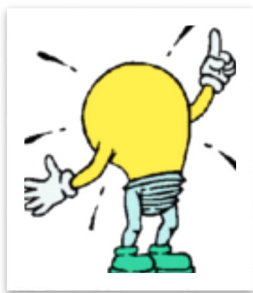
My scholars came home proud, tired, and excited. They enjoyed their first conference experience and claimed initial victories in the realm of their future professions. They were literacy ambassadors, representing their university with grace and



We caught our breath over gourmet gilled cheese sandwiches, a welcome and relaxing break for lunch.

dignity. They vindicated my efforts to teach students not merely to learn but to share their emergent mastery with others and inspired me to continue.

True learning occurs when something changes—ideas, beliefs, or actions. My students put their learning to work and demonstrated their learning in public. The action of attending a conference, making presentations, and networking with a professional community was evidence of the success of their lessons. Their joy in doing so proved the benefit of our pedagogical approach. Now they must finish polishing the written version of their papers. They are currently making plans to present their completed studies at the UAM Research and Scholarship Forum just after spring break. Wish them luck!



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## What about you?

How do you inspire your students to make their work public? Send best practice activities and ideas to our newsletter editor to share with the other members of ACTELA, [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu).

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## Looking for a Conference?

If you are looking for a venue for publishing or sharing your scholarship with others, don't forget about our own peer-reviewed journal, [AEJ](#).

Alternatively, the Department of English at University of Pennsylvania hosts a Call for Papers website here: <http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/>

You can announce a conference or search for one to attend by category of research interest. If you find entries of particular interest, let us know!

# LOOKING FORWARD

# TO NCTE 2017

The theme for NCTE 2017 is **Teaching Our Students Today, Tomorrow, Forever: Recapturing Our Voices, Our Agency, Our Mission.**

You can find more information here:

[http://  
www.ncte.org/  
annual](http://www.ncte.org/annual)

the opportunity for a wonderful and enriching professional experience. Make plans to be there!

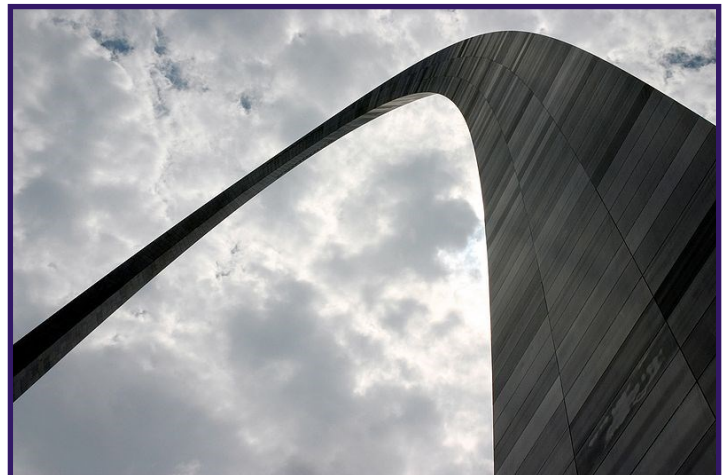
If you are interested in ride sharing, contact your newsletter editor for further information: [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)

## ARKANSAS IN ST. LOUIS

ACTELA Board members will be presenting sessions at NCTE in St. Louis. We are making plans now to attend the national gathering. Because the conference is close to home this year, the cost of travel will be minimal.

Make plans to join us. We hope to take school vans again, so we can share the cost of travel. We are all looking forward to the best conferences ever.

Don't miss





# ACC 2017

Do you have ideas for a luncheon speaker for this year's ACTELA Luncheon at ACC? ACTELA invites a featured author to join our conference each year. Past authors who have spoken at ACC include Matthew Quick, Sonia Gensler, Crystal Allen, Mike Mullin, and Christopher Paul Curtis. This year's conference will feature a writer from Arkansas. If you know of a local author our members would enjoy meeting at ACC, contact a board member to introduce your suggestion at the next board meeting. Stay tuned for updates as we determine who the 2017 speaker will be and provide information about the writer for you to share with your colleagues and students. **Be sure to get your tickets for the ACTELA Luncheon when you register for ACC!** They come in limited supply, and it would be too sad if we ran out and you weren't able to hear our featured author speak or take part in our business meeting.

- ◇ Our ACTELA Preservice members will be presenting Roundtable discussions of their research. Come see what the next generation of English and Language Arts teachers are excited about and offer your input.
- ◇ Board Members will be facilitating another installment of the annual Writeathon. Come create with us!
- ◇ We'll be discussing options for future regional meetings. Voice your opinions.
- ◇ We'll have free tickets for the Butler Center Reception. Get one so you can join the party.

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Have you ever wanted to travel to the United Kingdom to study the British literature and authors you teach? It's not too late to make plans for the travel seminar scheduled for May 2017. If you have a passport and are interested, email the instructor: [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu) to learn about the graduate seminar which will be offered through the [University of Arkansas at Monticello](#). If you don't have a passport yet, now is the time to apply for one so you aren't left behind.

## Let's Go!



# Travel Seminar to Great Britain

**Graduate** or **Undergraduate** Credit in English Offered  
Through University of Arkansas at Monticello

## Itinerary for May 2017

- 16<sup>th</sup> overnight flight from Little Rock to London Heathrow
- 17<sup>th</sup> arrive Heathrow, collect hire car, drive to Isle of Wight <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/days-out/regionlondonseasouth/isle-of-wight>
- 18<sup>th</sup> tour Isle of Wight <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/the-needles-headland-and-tennyson-down> , meet with Colin Ford [https://www.amazon.com/Colin-Ford/e/B001HPBVCI/ref=sr\\_ntt\\_srch\\_lnk\\_1?qid=1488468991&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Colin-Ford/e/B001HPBVCI/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1488468991&sr=8-1) and James Dearden [https://www.amazon.com/James-S.-Dearden/e/B001JXV00Q/ref=sr\\_ntt\\_srch\\_lnk\\_1?qid=1488468892&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/James-S.-Dearden/e/B001JXV00Q/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1488468892&sr=8-1) , drive to Tintagel <http://www.thisisnorthcornwall.com/tintagel.html>
- 19<sup>th</sup> tour Tintagel Castle <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/tintagel-castle/> , drive to Cheddar <http://cheddardillage.co.uk/>
- 20<sup>th</sup> tour Cheddar Gorge <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cheddar-gorge> , drive to Brecon Beacons <http://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/brecon-beacons>
- 21<sup>st</sup> tour Tintern Abbey [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintern\\_Abbey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintern_Abbey) and Hay-on-Wye <http://www.hay-on-wye.co.uk/> , drive to Bewdley <https://neilsinden.wordpress.com/author/neilsinden/>
- 22<sup>nd</sup> complete service learning project in Wyre Forest <http://www.wyrect.org.uk/> , drive to Coniston Coppermines <http://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/coniston-coppermines>
- 23<sup>rd</sup> tour Brantwood <http://www.brantwood.org.uk/> , drive to Stirling <https://www.syha.org.uk/where-to-stay/lowlands/stirling.aspx>
- 24<sup>th</sup> tour Stirling Castle <http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/> , drive to Inverness <https://www.syha.org.uk/where-to-stay/highlands/inverness.aspx>
- 25<sup>th</sup> tour Culloden Battlefield <http://www.nts.org.uk/Culloden/Home/> , drive to Pitlochry <https://www.syha.org.uk/where-to-stay/highlands/pitlochry.aspx>
- 26<sup>th</sup> tour Killiecrankie Visitor Center <http://www.nts.org.uk/Property/Killiecrankie/> , drive to Alston <http://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/alston>
- 27<sup>th</sup> drive to Hartington Hall <http://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/hartington-hall> , <https://www.chatsworth.org/>
- 28<sup>th</sup> drive to Oxford <http://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/oxford>
- 29<sup>th</sup> tour Blackwells <https://www.blackwell.co.uk/rarebooks/> , drive to London, drop off hire car, tube to St Pauls <http://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/london-st-pauls>
- 30<sup>th</sup> fly to Arkansas

For further information, contact the instructor, **Dr. Kay Walter** at [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)

# Arkansas Anthology 2017

The call for submissions for *Arkansas Anthology 2017* is still open. You can find it here:

[http://actela.weebly.com/uploads/2/4/7/4/24748280/call\\_for\\_submissions\\_2017.pdf](http://actela.weebly.com/uploads/2/4/7/4/24748280/call_for_submissions_2017.pdf)

Past issues of *Arkansas Anthology* are available online as pdf files under the INITIATIVES tab on our website here:

<http://actela.weebly.com/arkansas-anthology.html>

Print versions exist only in very limited quantities. Contact Aaron Hall for further information about access or submissions and about the exciting new interactive aspects

we will innovate this year. [ARAnthology@gmail.com](mailto:ARAnthology@gmail.com)

# AEJ

## Turning the Digital Page

Submissions are now being accepted for AEJ Volume 3.1. The issue theme is Turning the Page. The manuscript deadline is May 1st. Share your research, recommendations, pedagogical approaches, outcomes, stories, tips, reflections, and curricular ideas in a peer-reviewed publication for a wide audience of English and language arts enthusiasts. If you have ideas you want to propose for future AEJ themes, share them with our journal editor, Janine Chitty

[ACTELA123@gmail.com](mailto:ACTELA123@gmail.com).

The theme of the current issue of AEJ is advocacy. It is available online here:

<http://arkansas-english-journal.weebly.com/current-aej-issue.html>

The call for manuscripts for the upcoming issue is available here:

<http://arkansas-english-journal.weebly.com/call-for-manuscript-submission.html>

# Ecology of the Writing Classroom

by **Grover Welch**, Gosnell Junior High School

Spring is a rejuvenating time of year when teachers and students crave the open air of outside and fight the urge to be elsewhere rather than locked inside the four walls of their classrooms. This time of year lends itself to renewal in so many ways. It is also a reminder that nature, like everything else, has to take time to build summer. Nature has to rejuvenate the soil and make the fields ready for the growth of summer; it doesn't just happen. Teachers begin spring cleaning their classrooms, preparing for end-of-year testing, and introducing the final few studies of the school year. They also begin the overall review of what worked and what did not during the school year. For me, I pull out my logs of reflections, old lesson plans, and student exemplars and begin the slow introspection of where I succeeded and where I didn't. A spring cleaning of my lessons and work yields change, and this process, whether fun or not, is the first step to nurturing my classroom ecology for next year.

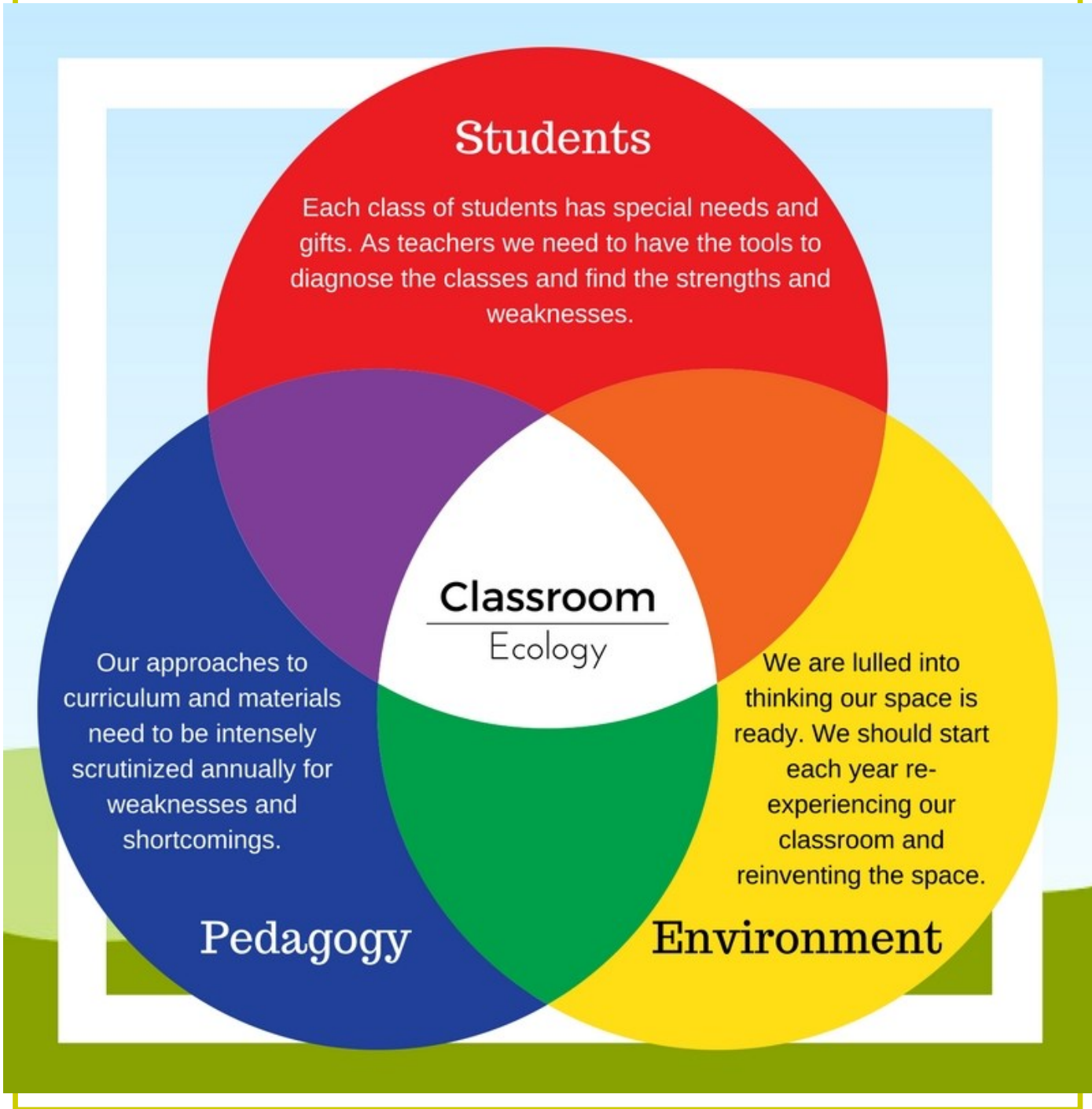
In nature, ecological systems develop both naturally and artificially within an environment. The systems that develop within any environment work together for the benefit and survival of larger structures. Examples are many, but one I always think of is my garden. In the garden sit the rows waiting to produce the fruit and vegetables that will yield fall canning. Each plant has its own section of the garden, and I plan each section to perform within the whole. I plant my corn along the west row so it can shade my easily burned tomatoes from the hard afternoon sun of late summer, a lesson I learned the hard way my first year planting when I burned up all my tomatoes and had none by fall. This planning helps me ensure production from my tomato plants. Each section of the garden is planned and placed to ensure the growth of the whole garden. Just as the ecology of the garden plan can yield optimal produce, the proper planning and structuring of classroom ecology can optimize learning in the classroom.



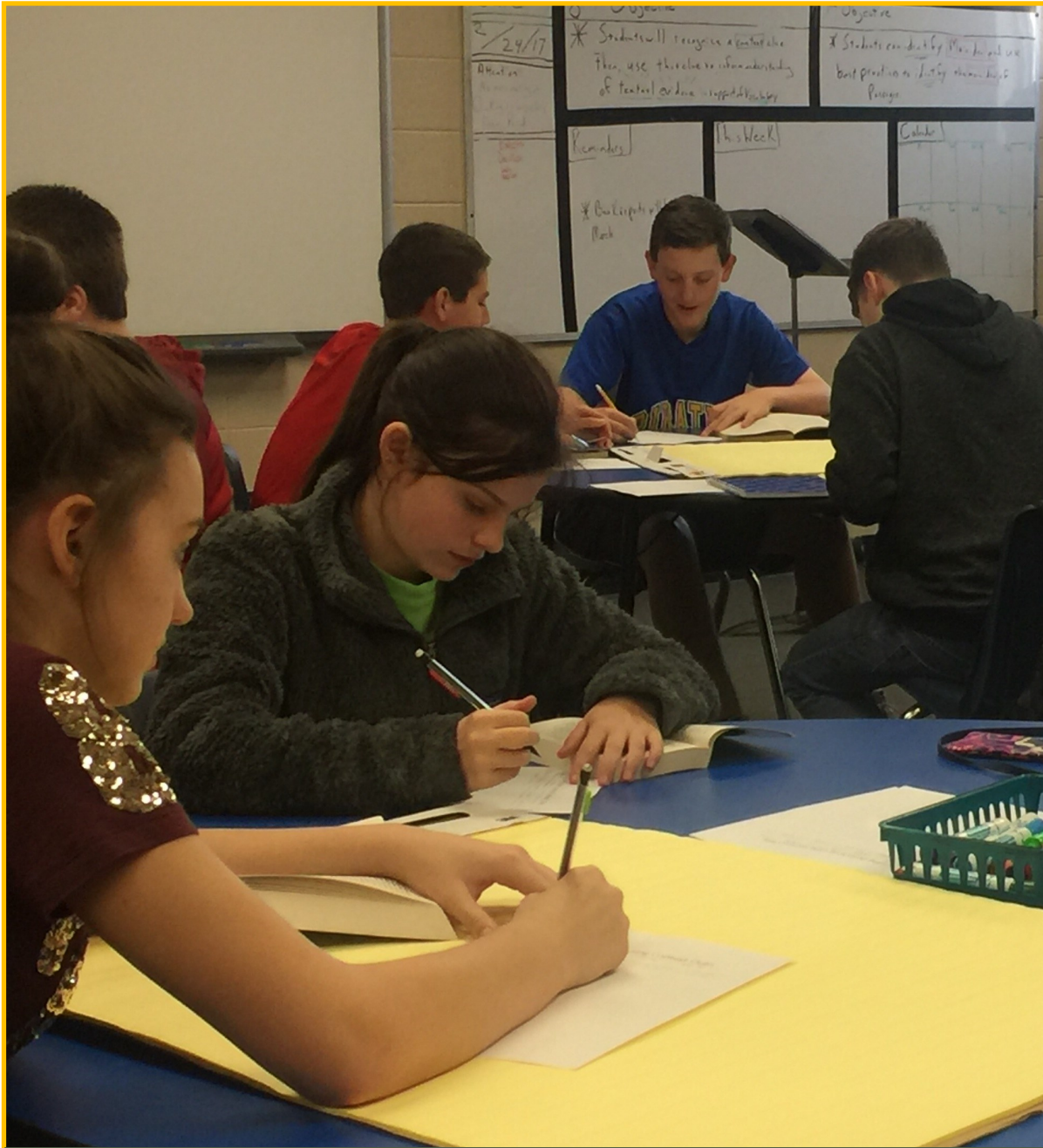
So it is that in spring I look at my classroom's previous year, or years, and rework the ecology to benefit my students. I am working within well-established systems, and I can stratify the layered systems to benefit each other and improve individually. It is often in the spring when I become the researcher my classroom needs. The focus on redefining and recreating my classroom ecology for the next year creates in me the need to follow the advice of Ladson and Billings, to illuminate action research traditions and look reflexively at practice to solve pedagogical problems

(Ladson-Billings, 1995). I look at the macro and micro perspectives in the room to develop sound research possibilities. I look at tools such as diagnostic instruments that could yield insight into what has worked. Logically, I have built in these mechanisms and can scan through testing data; diagnostic reading data I retain from Read theory, LitTA, and other programs; and the reflections of the lessons I write each day.

My classroom is predominantly a writing classroom. Because I make writing my standard mechanism of production, the ecological strata requires that I understand how writing lies overtop of all my proscribed standards. If I make this choice, I have to ensure that the physical makeup of my



lessons are readily assessable in writing. But within those assessments I need to insure the authenticity of what I am asking of my students, insure the systems I have in place support writing at all times, and



Students work together to write critiques of lessons and units. These allow students to give specific feedback to the teacher about how well a teacher's lesson worked or didn't work. They also are encouraged to treat learning like a product and to make recommendations to teachers of how they may improve or make lessons or units better. We call these exercises *Focus Groups* and the kids love them.

insure the lessons I teach reinforce the ecology of writing. So spring time review requires a hard line approach: did I do this or did I not?

Once the review is over, the heavy lifting of structural rebuilding begins. What did I like from the previous year? What new ideas am I introducing? What new demands are being levied by administration, and what are my next iteration of students going to bring to the table? What are their expectations? My ecology takes into consideration other aspects of my classroom. How did posters/classroom decorations affect learning? What are the benefits or hindrances of the seating arrangement I have? What elements in the learning environment can I change to better my teaching practice? All the strata of the classroom have to lie bare for examination and the ecology has to be carefully planned, like my garden, to perform at its best. I learn each year how to be better at this spring renewal, and each year I strip bare the framework supporting each classroom I manage and examine the pieces to determine where I can improve.

Many times this is when I peruse the many articles and photos I have clipped from Pinterest and other sites. Overseeing the ecology of my classroom has grown more demanding year by year. This year I have read an article that outlines creating better writing ecology in the classroom using a system that breaks down writing in automotive and engineering terms. The system develops multiple new and different opportunities for writing kids have never seen. I am also amused by a teacher in Florida who created a series of educational challenges the students could only master through the process of writing. These are ideas I can consider now during the spring for implementation next year. I can look for opportunities to broach these approaches with my students now, and test responses before next year that could inform how I introduce them and how I design my goals. Just as crops must be rotated to keep the land fertile, approaches need to change to keep our classroom yielding at their peaks. Experimentation is a vital part of the classroom ecology I am reviewing. Not everything stays.

Spring is the time I find room in my classroom for new.

Like the garden soil turns over in early preparation for planting, so my process and pedagogy turn over in my mind and resituate for the next year. It is a process that has benefits in the present and coming years. In the present it allows for my class to rejuvenate by experimenting with new ideas, looking at what worked, and embracing new attitudes. The long range effects are evident in the yearly growth I experience in the classes I teach. Spring has sprung the latch on looking back and bettering the future. The process is cathartic and redemptive, but it is also crafting the ecology of the future.



Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). "Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy." *American Educational Research Journal*, 32 (3), 465-91.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS, AWARDS, NEWS, AND NOTES

- ◆ **Cast your vote!** Which issue of our newsletter is your favorite? When we apply for the NCTE Affiliate Newsletter Award, we must select three issues of our newsletter published between May 1, 2016 and now for the award committee to review. Which three should we send? Declare your preference by emailing our editor: [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)
- ◆ **Jeff Wittingham** is the author of a literacy link! One of his recently published articles, “Using literature circles to increase reading motivation,” is available here: <http://rapidintellect.com/AEQweb/fal2016.htm>
- ◆ Other recent publications co-authored by **Jeff** include “Implementation of the A+ Schools Program: An Examination of Baseline Teacher Perceptions and Instructional Behaviors” in *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education*, 4(2) and “Celebrating the national park service’s centennial: 100 years of environmental education” in *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 28(3), 27-30. Well done, Scholar!
- ◆ Your board members met via ZOOM on February 25th. We welcomed a new member, **Dr. Conrad Shumaker**, Chair of UCA’s English Department. ACTELA has a longstanding relationship with UCA’s English Department through Dr. Linda Arnold. Since she retired from teaching, we have missed having a link there, and we are glad to renew our contact. Welcome, Conrad!
- ◆ **Grover Welch** has been accepted into the Doctor of Arts in English Pedagogy and Technology program at Murray State University in Murray Kentucky. His coursework will begin in June. Best wishes from all your ACTELA colleagues!

## And What’s New in Your World?

If you have news to share, send it to your newsletter editor so we can share your burden of concern or help you celebrate and rejoice. [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)



# Global Perspective

Our wider view of literacy endeavors for this issue is provided by a literacy enthusiast from Italy. **Anna Rudelli** is a student in the **Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere** at the **Università degli Studi di Milano**. Her undergraduate degree required a written dissertation on Dorothy Wordsworth and the Lake District Ecosystem, and research for this writing involved international travel which took her to England. She says “wherever you come from, whatever your interests, if you really care about something you will always find someone out there from whom you can learn.” Dr. Kay Walter

## Rambling the Lake District in Search of Inspiration

by **Anna Rudelli**

It all started when I was about 9 years old: my grandpa gave me *Little Women* as a present for Christmas. It was the first novel I ever read, and, like many other little girls around the world, I immediately felt a deep connection to Jo March, to her spirit of adventure, her interest in books, and her good heart. A whole world opened to me back then, and it is still unfolding in front of me today: the novel by Alcott was followed by Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and the whole canon of English Literature. American literature surfaced again some years later, during my second year in university.

I have to be thankful to many people for my love of books, my interest in research and my never-ending desire to discover something new. My primary school teacher is the woman who taught me to read, and she did it in a way that I still remember: at the beginning of first grade she told the class that, by the end of the year, we would have been able to read through a book titled *Cipì*, the story of a little bird that sees the world from its nest and is impatient to explore it. First of all, the book was written by primary school children, a fact in itself inspiring.



Front path of Dove Cottage, Town End, Grasmere  
This is the view a resident would see from the main door.



Rydal Water is the lake Wordsworth built his family home to face after he was appointed Poet Laureate.

They were helped, of course, by their teacher and main author, Mario Lodi. Second of all, my teacher would let each student of the class read aloud a little every day. So we all became good readers.

Some years later, in high school, my English and my Latin professors nurtured and supported my interest in literature as well: they understood me, and they suggested that I read certain books, confident that those books would help me through the tough teenage years. They actually did.

Thanks to these wonderful people I landed in the English Studies department in the University of Milan, Italy, where I met one more professor who boosted my interest in literature and sowed the seeds of my activity in research, with her immense knowledge and ability to share her passion. It was during one of her lectures that I first heard the name of Dorothy Wordsworth, sister of the well-known Romantic poet William Wordsworth, and herself author of two beautiful diaries and some poems, published posthumously. During the lecture, the professor said that the true poet was Dorothy, not her brother. She quoted the poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud", and told us that William had drawn inspiration for it from his sister's journal. So I went home and read it. After that statement, I decided to write my BA dissertation on Dorothy Wordsworth, and to go to the Lake District (the lakes region in Northern England) in order to walk the same paths she trod, visit her house, gaze at the same scenery she looked at from her window and, on top of all, to learn all I could about her life and activity. So I went to Dove Cottage in Grasmere, where Dorothy lived with her brother for eight years, and I visited the nearby Wordsworth Museum, where I learned almost everything there is to know about this inspiring woman. The locals care about their Romantic past, and I was



Anna's favorite reading spot is here in the hills behind Ambleside, a setting the Wordsworths would have known well.

amazed at the sight of so many young people, like myself, who volunteered for the Wordsworth Trust at Dove Cottage and answered every question one might ask. During my stay in the Lake District I met the keeper of the grammar school in the village of Hawkshead, who showed me the very spot where William Wordsworth had carved his name on a desk, thus revealing that time may pass, but when there is keen interest, knowledge never grows old.

As it is pretty clear now, the red thread in my life has always been a love of books, which led me to choose a university curriculum that has allowed me to dig deeper into the world of literature. The phrase 'world of literature' in itself is an inspiration: just by turning a page in a book one can time travel to the distant past or future, visit real or imagined worlds, walk side by side with extraordinary creatures. The list could go on forever. The inspiration comes from the simple, mechanical act of reading the words printed on a page while sitting down comfortably, or even while waiting for the bus to go home.

The further step one can make, the step I myself am trying to take, is to bring this passion for literature to the next level, to contribute to the knowledge. The World Wide Web nowadays allows and helps us to fulfil our desire of knowledge, by attending webinars and online courses, by consulting books in libraries across the Atlantic, by reading this newsletter. The Web has been a fundamental resource for my MA dissertation, for instance: the subject of my research, this time, was John Muir, the Scottish-born American naturalist, writer and mountaineer. I live in Italy, and thanks to modern technology I have been able to consult the digital library of the University of the Pacific at Stockton, California without facing the many efforts an intercontinental journey requires. There, in the Holt-Atherton Special Collection, there is the manuscript collection of John Muir's correspondence. Today this website offers the only complete collection of Muir's nearly 7000 letters. Once again, during my research I have found a helping hand: Mike

Wurz, the University Archivist and Head of Special Collections at the University of the Pacific, had been so kind to send me some research material that could not be found or consulted online.



This is the back view of Dove Cottage, as seen from the uppermost corner of the garden.

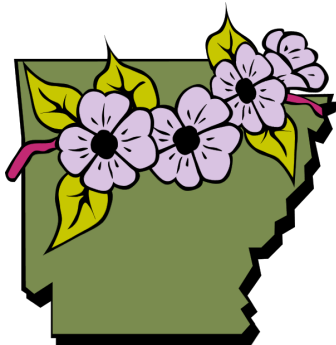
For the past two years my research interests have revolved around the culture and poetics of the garden from the point of view of gender and life-writing: I have been studying and writing about this for a while, ever trying to do my best.

Patience, passion and determination are the keywords for those who want to study literature, who in turn will be gifted with pride, joy and fulfilment. To steal a quotation from Pamela Woof, the first scholar who studied the works of Dorothy Wordsworth, gave them a literary status and led future researchers and scholars to go on: "There is simply nothing like it anywhere else".



Questions and comments for the author of this Global Perspective may be addressed to her via the newsletter editor: [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)

# Growing Connections



Literacy and NCTE is the official blog of the National Council of Teachers of English:

<http://blog.ncte.org/>

Have plans to travel this summer, ACTELA? Professional travel is a vital form of education that encourages networking and experiential learning beyond the classroom. Share our newsletter and contact information with literacy advocates you meet, and encourage them to connect with their affiliates. Bring back stories and best practices from their lives too and share them with us!

## Email Contacts for Ideas and Input

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