

# ACTELA Newsletter

Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts

As the Middle English lyric tells us, “Sumer is ycomen in.” It’s warm now, but ACTELA board members had to forego their annual retreat this year when winter weather refused to cooperate. In lieu of that gathering, they have worked hard to stay connected virtually. The communications are not as enriching but still productive. Exciting plans for ACC 2015 are well underway now. Read about conference updates on page four.

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## Letter from the President, Dixie Keys

So, summertime. No longer do teachers have languorous summers, or did they ever? Some teachers must pack their entire classrooms for floor waxing before their year is over; some are facilitating PD sessions; some are attending extended summer institutes of various kinds; some write curriculum; some work with extracurricular adventures like cheerleading camps or summer school. Many use the summer to work on NBCT portfolios or graduate school. This summer, take a few moments and think about one precious thing you can do for yourself—just you. One thing



that is kind to yourself—perhaps a way to rest or honor who you are. Start a poetry journal; schedule a few massages; plan a pedicure party with friends; go to a yoga class; spend some afternoons by a poolside; map out the movies you missed through year and watch them. Life is short and time is precious. This summer, do something for yourselves, teachers...because you have spent the past nine months, every day, committing yourselves to many, many lives. Be kind to yourselves this summer.

## We Want to Connect!

Visit our website: <http://www.actela.org/home>

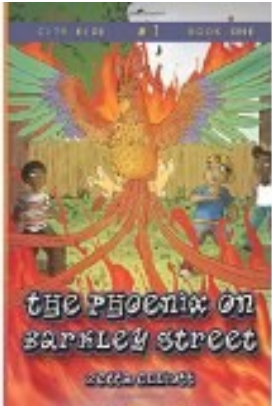
Email our editor: [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)

Or Friend us on Facebook by searching:

**Arkansas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts**



# **Zetta Elliott** has accepted **ACTELA's** invitation to be **visiting author for 2015.**



In addition to her luncheon address and breakout workshop sessions at ACC, Zetta Elliott will be visiting schools in Arkansas to share her books and ideas with public school students. The following schools will host her as our visiting author this year:

Star City High School, Consolidated Youth Services in Jonesboro, Lee County High School, and Bob Courtway Middle School in Conway

Find descriptions of her ACC presentations on page four.

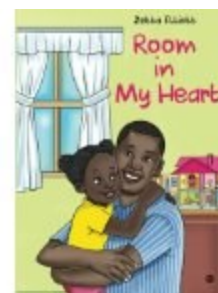
## Discussion Questions For Teacher Use on Zetta Elliott's Books

1. What is diversity and what does it add to our lives?
2. How does reading feed our imaginations, and why does that make us richer?
3. Why is it important to find characters in books we read who are like ourselves? Should all the characters be similar to people we know?



Hear an [Interview with Zetta Elliott](http://www.diyauthor.com/traditional-publishing-is-an-obsolete-model-with-author-zetta-elliott/) about her writing here:

<http://www.diyauthor.com/traditional-publishing-is-an-obsolete-model-with-author-zetta-elliott/>



**Which books by Zetta Elliott are your favorites? If you have ideas for introducing Elliott's works to students, share them! Email them to our newsletter editor at [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu).**

# In Our Own Words

Feedback is important to help judge the quality of our work. Here are some of the comments ACTELA has received recently:

- ◆ “I had someone contact me about presenting at ACC!” Sunny Stiles-Foster
- ◆ “Awesome!!!” Donna Wake
- ◆ “The interdisciplinary conference you are sponsoring sounds like a great opportunity.” Elaine Simos
- ◆ “I am so excited about being at ACC this year.” Linda Arnold

**ACTELA members, speak out!**

**Have comments to share? We welcome your ideas, questions, and suggestions. Let your voice be heard!**

## ACTELA News and Notes:

Congratulations to ACTELA’s President, Dr. Dixie Keyes, who recently won a medal for completing a mini-triathlon and reminds us all of the importance of staying physically active. Way to set a good example and keep us all inspired, Dixie!



Louise Godwin has donated a UCA master’s hood to the College of Education to be loaned to commencement candidates who cannot afford to purchase hoods prior to their graduation ceremony. Do you know someone with commencement regalia to pass along to a new generation of scholars in Arkansas? Let us know, and we’ll help facilitate its continued usefulness.



Keep your fingers crossed! ACTELA Newsletter has applied for national recognition from the annual NCTE Newsletter Award. Watch for the announcement of our outcome in future issues.

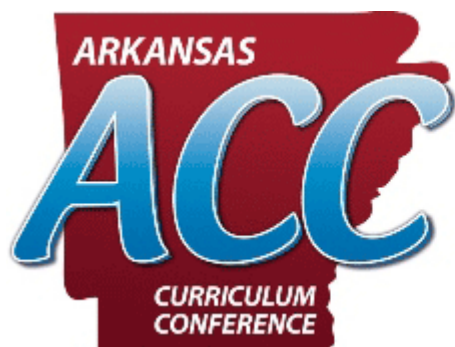


Congratulations to board member Dr. Kay Walter on her appointment to a University of Arkansas System eVersity Design Team. Read about Arkansas’s newest university here:



<http://eversity.uasys.edu/>

# News from Arkansas Curriculum Conference 2015



## Arkansas CURRICULUM CONFERENCE

### Visiting Author Sessions

**Zetta Elliott's ACTELA Luncheon talk is "Inclusivity and Indie Authors: the Case for Community-Based Publishing":** Zetta Elliott evolved from an immigrant with a dream into a published author of thirteen books for young readers. Her talk will include tips on promoting diversity and equity in children's literature.

**In addition to her luncheon address, our visiting author will hold two breakout sessions: "Music Stirs Memories":** In Zetta Elliott's book *Bird*, Mehkai uses his artistic ability to preserve his favorite memories of his beloved brother, Marcus. This writing workshop, which follows a PowerPoint presentation, encourages participants to use music to recall their happiest moment shared with someone far away. This memory is then documented in a "sankofa postcard" to their loved one. **and "Crossing the Threshold":** Author Zetta Elliott shares her particular interest in *doors*. What do portals mean to black people whose ancestors once

### Dr. Linda Arnold to Accept Carolyn Pitman Lifetime Achievement Award

In 2014, ACTELA voted to present the Carolyn Pitman Lifetime Achievement Award to our longstanding member and advocate, Dr. Linda Arnold. She was unable to be present at the 2014 conference, so we deferred the presentation of her award to 2015. At this year's luncheon on Thursday, November 5th, the award will be presented. To be present for Dr. Arnold's acceptance speech, be sure to purchase your luncheon tickets when you register for ACC 2015.

This year at ACC, Preservice teachers will share the results of cutting-edge scholarship in the field of education. They will be ready to answer questions in a fun, interactive session. Come support the new generation of teachers and find out where research is headed as they present their findings in a lively roundtable discussion.



# Publications and Professional Development

## Arkansas Anthology

Submissions are now closed for 2015. The review process is underway, and selections for publication will be announced soon. **Editor's Choice Awards** are presented at ACTELA's Luncheon. Attend the *Arkansas Anthology* session at ACC to hear selected authors read their work.

**If you missed the deadline for submitting this year, it's not too soon to begin considering what to submit next year!**

## AEJ

The Publications Committee has established a timeline for production of the new journal. The theme for the first issue is **Voices in Teaching English and Language Arts** and the deadline for submissions is June 2015. Look for a Call for Submissions to be posted on our website. All submissions will be peer-reviewed, and electronic publication is anticipated in September. Stay tuned for updates!



## Writing Opportunities and Summer Conferences

Summer offers many opportunities for professional enrichment. Here are events of note:

- ⇒ 71st Annual Arkansas Writers' Conference <http://www.arkansaswritersconference.org/>
- ⇒ Literacy Design Collaborative in Arkansas Conference [http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning\\_Services/Professional\\_Development/LDC\\_FLIER1\\_Jan27\\_2015.pdf](http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/Professional_Development/LDC_FLIER1_Jan27_2015.pdf)
- ⇒ 24<sup>th</sup> MELTA International Conference 2015 <http://con2015.melta.org.my/>
- ⇒ 3rd Alumni, CTJ and Ibeu TEFL Conference [https://www.facebook.com/3rdTEFLConference/info?tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/3rdTEFLConference/info?tab=page_info)
- ⇒ 2015 Memorial Library Summer Seminar on Holocaust Education in New York City <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/events/801>

Do you know of other summer options? Send them along so we can share ideas with all our members.

# Global Perspective

## Teaching in the United Arab Emirates by Meredith Bruce, MEd

As an American, living and working overseas in the Middle East is the most wonderful professional experience that I have ever had. Five years ago I was recruited by Specialist Schools and Academy Trust (SSAT) in Abu Dhabi, UAE to help local Emirati teachers modernize delivery of English Language Arts. The public schools in the capital of the United Arab Emirates needed a facelift and they were willing to invest a large amount of capital to accomplish it. Lots of paperwork later, I was transported to the Land of Sand.

The social shift was immediately apparent as I was disembarking the plane. Most notably, I was picked up by a gentleman wearing a Dishdash and Khandoura (traditional wear for local and non-local Arab men). With the exception of Kindergarten, all cycles of schools (grade 1-12) are segregated. Boys and girls do NOT attend the same public school. The boys and girls even have different bus schedules to ensure this. All students wear uniforms. The girls' uniform consists of a long dress with an undershirt that is long sleeved, cuffed and collared. After the age of about 12, all girls wear an Abaya and Shayla. These are long, gauzy, black gowns and head wraps. This is definitely removed after entering the "all female" domain of the school. Males must "ring a bell" to be announced into a girl's school so that teachers and administrators can "cover" for modesty. This rule is NEVER violated.

The school I started at was a middle school (grades 4 – 9). At that time all subjects were taught in Arabic, even English. Teachers delivered the lesson in English, but they explained it in Arabic. There is no direct correlation in translation from English to Arabic. English is written left to right, Arabic, left to right. Arabic has no "to be" verb. Think how often we use "to be" verbs for past, present, subjunctive, and auxiliary constructions!

The school SSAT team consisted of an English team leader (me), an ESL trainer (someone who gave private instruction to the local Arabic teachers during the school day 3 – 5 hours weekly), and a whole Team Leader. I worked with 8 local Emirati English teachers. These ladies were gracious, courteous, and educated in TESOL, but they struggled with delivery of instruction and had issues with pronunciation of English sounds. Similarly, I struggle with trying to reproduce certain sounds in the Arabic alphabet that when making them sounds like I am hacking up a hairball, to the local children's great amusement.

An anecdote that illustrates our early efforts to perfect communication was when one of the local teachers worked up the nerve to converse with me after about a week. She shyly asked where I was from. I told her, "The United States." with a smile. She got a concerned look on her face and said, "America?" I affirmed this. She then said, again with a concerned voice, "Do you think of me, us, as tourists?" Glibly, I smiled and stated, "Oh, no, I am the tourist here." Ayesha began to speak in a furtive, worried tone in Arabic to the other local teachers. I looked at my colleagues, somewhat bemused. She then stated, with a horrified voice, "You fly planes into buildings?!" Dawn over Marblehead – "No, NO!! I am a tourist not a TERRORIST! A visitor to your country. Tourist." I said with dreadful understanding. Hesitantly, we all breathed a sigh of relief. International incident averted!

Honestly, being an English instructor immersed in such a rich, culturally diverse region has been eye-opening. Children are children the world over, and all children are



readily open to learning through play. Emirati children want to learn and are well on their way to being fluently bi-lingual. The process of instruction is much different from English Language Arts instruction in the States.

I provided support to teachers and students alike. I created reading classes during breaks that were so popular that I had to limit attendance because books were so scarce. I am now the proud owner of enough visual-kinesthetic materials to outfit three classrooms because that is how instruction is best delivered here. When our teams first arrived, classic instruction in the schools was through rote memorization. No or minimal note taking was allowed, and there was no game playing to reinforce concepts. Now, visuals always accompany auditory information.

Teachers were initially reluctant to use these techniques, but they quickly saw the efficacy of the new approach as English use and proficiency improved. The girls were far from perfect, but they are loving and funny children. Just as other children around the world, they find ways to buck the system. Even in a culture that is in some ways extremely conservative and rigidly adheres to traditional values, girls will be girls.

They found sneaky ways to get around the formal dress code. They all wore long skirts so as to more easily hide their little secrets. Their skirts hid colored shoe laces of their “trainers” (sneakers). Every hue of the rainbow was surreptitiously hidden from searching eyes that were ever watchful for uniform violations. If a girl were caught transgressing, parents were called. So they went to great lengths to never get caught! I stumbled on this secret – but I’d never tell – and the girls and I made fast friends.

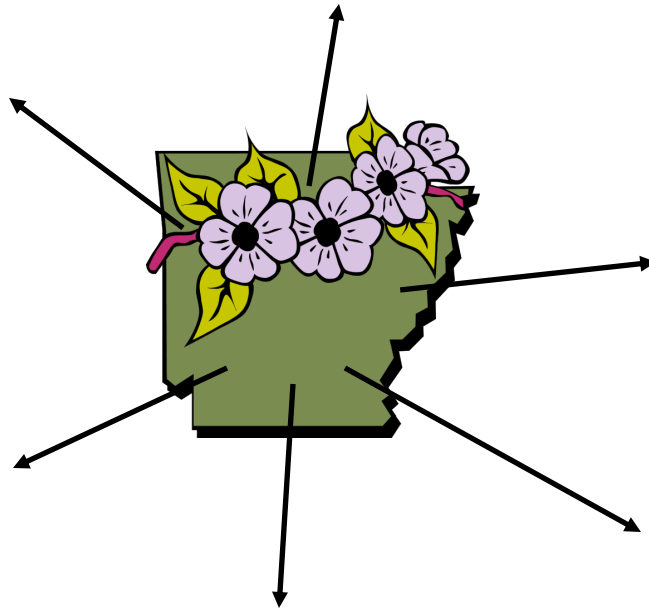
I went to work as a Senior Specialist at the governmental level after about 20 months and then moved into the International School System. I have remained friends with my local teachers at the six different schools that I supported. I would recommend this type of unique teaching situation for anyone who is willing to live and work in a wonderful, complex, complicated, and relatively conservative society. It isn’t for everyone as it is far removed from the US, but the UAE is extremely Western and overall it is one of the most family friendly places I have ever been. Living here does require patience and flexibility, but you will be rewarded with the wonder of making a difference. You will also know some sadness and confusion as there are restrictions in the Middle East that affect women and children. But I am perfectly happy calling this my home away from home, and I am glad to help give the girls here the gift of strong and successful ELA instruction.

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## Growth Is Our Goal

ACTELA is particularly interested in membership-building this year. Our ACTELA CIT, where we are considering an inquiry question about harvesting the synergistic power of our membership, is open for comment, and we have composed and distributed a letter to two-year college English instructors telling them about our organization and inviting them to join us. We also want to serve public and private school ELA teachers, university English faculty, homeschooling parents who instruct their children in ELA, and everyone interested in strengthening and supporting ELA education in Arkansas. Help us find and connect with them. If you know people who aren’t members, and should be, point them to our website, encourage them to become members, and bring them with you to ACC to see how enriching the experience can be.

# Making Connections



Exciting summer travel plans, ACTELA? Travel is a form of education that encourages learning beyond the classroom. Tell us where you are going and what you hope to bring back to share with your students.

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## Email Contacts for Questions/Comments

Membership

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Anthology Submissions

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Have ideas you'd like to see discussed in our newsletter?  
Send them to our newsletter editor at [walter@uamont.edu](mailto:walter@uamont.edu)