

# The English Pub

## ACTELA Newsletter

Arkansas Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts



### Letter from the President

Thelma Mothershed-Wair, Minnijean Brown-Trickey, Jefferson Thomas, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, and Melba Pattillo Beals are the nine Individuals that attended Central High School when schools were slowly becoming desegregated.

Arkansas holds these names dear to remember their story and our state's history.

Visit the **Little Rock Central High National Historic Site** website to find more information about The Nine.

Greetings, ACTELA members,

February brings with it the first glimmers of warmer weather here in Arkansas. While it isn't quite spring, it starts to feel a little less wintry each day of the month. Just as we're seeing "bright spots" in the weather, I hope you're finding moments of brightness and joy in your classrooms right now. I've always found that when I focus on those small, bright moments of student success, all the other administrative parts of my teaching become a little brighter as well. I would encourage you to

consider how you can share these stories of joyful learning with others. As teachers of English and literacy, one of the best parts of our work is unpacking stories with students.

How can you unpack the story of your classroom with your colleagues and your community? How might your students' stories impact and bring brightness and joy to others?

Wishing you all a bright and joyful February!

*Jessica Herring-Watson*

ACTELA President



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Arkansas Council of Teachers of  
English Language Arts

And Join ACTELA! [Become a member.](#)





# Editorial Note

by Dr Kay J. Walter

The current issue of *The English Pub* continues our tradition of excellence in reporting news of interest to literacy enthusiasts in Arkansas and our supporters around the world. We extend a hearty welcome to new readers from towns in Texas, California, Virginia, Florida, Idaho, and Illinois, as well as a reader in a seaside town in Devon, UK and another from Percy, Arkansas. We hope each of you will find continuing interest in our publication and inspiration to contribute your own news and vision.

We've decided to forego a writing prompt for the board members in this issue. Even teachers who are ACTELA leaders deserve a break now and then. We promise to return to making individual contributions soon. Instead, we've made room for announcements of upcoming professional development opportunities with available funding options which have imminent deadlines.

This issue does include our regular report from the classroom by Grover Welch. He encourages us here to develop the relationships we need to act as one another's cavalry. All teachers need backup sometimes, and career satisfaction rises when teachers can count on professional support.

Emily Jackson provides us with a reading recommendation in her review of the new book by Henry Louis Gates, Jr and Tonya Bolden, *Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Dawn of Jim Crow*. We feature two interviews: one with another teacher from the Jones family and the other with a literacy supporter from the community. Spencer Chastain, CEO of McGehee Boys and Girls Club, talks with Braden Taylor about how he encourages literacy development in his career and why he thinks this work is essential.

Our wider view this month is provided by a new friend I made at NCTE 2019 in Baltimore. Wesley Hall is from Bermuda. He introduces us to his view of life as an ELA teacher in an island paradise which many of us know only from fictive stories of vanishing airplanes.

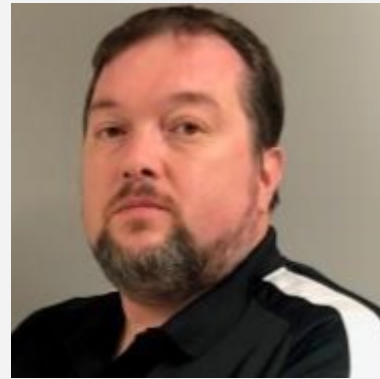
Plans for the next issue of *The English Pub* include a further installment from Tara Rowe, who provided our Global Perspective for November 2019. She has promised to tell us about overcoming her frustrations with MLA documentation. We're also planning an article about the difficulty of the work-life balance for ELA teachers, particularly in composition-intensive classrooms. As our online comments attest, contributions by Grover Welch have been popular. He has been faithful in supplying us with glimpses into his classroom and his career, and he has promised us another gem. We hope his efforts will continue.

Our book review team is working on a report about George Takei's graphic novel, *They Call Us Enemy*. If you hear of new YA books you think we should review, write us with a pitch for them. We are open to your suggestions, your ideas, your feedback, your interests, and your opinions. Upcoming plans include a retrospective look at *The English Pub* through the years. We have come a long way and have myriad successes to celebrate. I don't want to forget our journey, so we'll record it to illuminate the path for those that follow. Write and tell us what else you want to see. We can't wait to hear from you!

# Managing Relationships

By Grover Welch

Newport Special School District, High School



We all know that teaching has gotten increasingly more difficult to manage. We're constantly asked to do more with less, and there is no end to the increasing pressure on us from standardized testing, parents and administrators, the current anti-teacher climate, and top-down leadership. We all need help, so why is it so hard to get that right next door?

Walking down the hall during my prep period this week, I heard my neighbor teacher twice complain in a threatening tone that his kids needed to stop talking. I stopped and listened for a minute without hearing any change to the students' voices. I walked to the door and peered in. My fellow teacher was shaking his head, trying hard to teach his class some algebra and not being very successful at it.

These are ninth-grade students that I teach as well, and I know them. I opened the classroom door and stepped in. The entire dynamic in the room shifted as soon as the students saw me. They settled, quieted, and began to pay attention. I stood for several minutes, not talking, not threatening, just supporting my fellow teacher by my presence



**JUST AS WE INCLUDE PEER-TO-PEER CONVERSATION AS PART OF THE LEARNING PROCESS FOR OUR STUDENTS, CONVERSATION WITH PEERS CAN BE HELPFUL FOR TEACHERS TOO.**

in his room, silently backing his authority with these children.

What was so hard about this? Nothing. It took very little effort and made a big difference. I helped a fellow teacher, and he was grateful. Still, I know that walking through that door to help is risky. There are some teachers who would never walk into another's room without being asked, some who would hit the roof if you walked into their classroom, and some who would immediately feel threatened by the presence of another teacher in their classroom.

I have always thought the key to this type of dynamic is relationships among fellow teachers. Just as we spend so much time building our relationships with our students, we need to develop a culture that brings teachers together to support one another. This culture can be built with time and commitment dedicated to academic conversations.

As teachers, we spend many hours discussing lessons with students, but teachers can come into their classrooms in the morning, be at school all day long, and not interact with a single other adult until they head home at night. In my school, we put a premium on talking to each other about what is happening in our classrooms. These brief, or sometimes even lengthy, discussions build the professional foundations we need to understand how we can provide support for one another.

### **What is an academic conversation?**

An academic conversation is one that centers on practice, pedagogy, or content. As an English teacher, content can often be the most predominant topic



of discussion. However, as I have taught and worked with other educators, I have become convinced we have to elevate the topics of our one-to-one conversations beyond what we are teaching and shift to sharing how we are teaching, how we are managing our classrooms, and how we are in general—how our lives are going.

I was told once during a meeting not to ask any questions because that was not what was expected. I replied, “Then why hold a meeting?” Meetings should be opportunities for conversations. As professionals, we value our time. Why should we spend

**MR WELCH'S NINTH-GRADE CLASSROOM IS ALWAYS A BUSY SPACE.**

time in a meeting with another teacher if we are not required to do so? Such meetings can produce some of the most informative conversations you will have. They can build relationships and create a support network for you. They can result in your finding a strong ally right next door.

Take my neighboring teacher, for example. He is a young teacher with whom I have worked side by side all year. He and I have had many conversations about classroom management techniques, practices related to assessment, and many other topics of professional interest. These have resulted in improvements both to my own teaching and to his. We support each other through a professional culture. We exchange ideas, brainstorm solutions, and develop new techniques to try. When I step into his classroom, he knows I am there to back his efforts to teach his students. I come to provide tangible support, nothing else.

I have read many articles on developing Professional Learning Communities and realize these conversations fit within the PLC Model, but too often I see the model existing in theory rather than in practice. Teachers need to band together to support each other actively and make teaching a more sustainable career. There are four things we can do to forward these conversations.



**MR WELCH AND HIS NINTH-GRADERS HAVE A CLASSROOM  
ATMOSPHERE OF MUTUAL RESPECT WHICH HE CAN USE TO SUPPORT  
THEIR LEARNING IN OTHER CLASSROOMS AS WELL.**

**Listen:** One type of listening often referred to as Active Listening is effective when talking to colleagues. It requires the listener to concentrate, understand, remember, and respond to what others say. When we are listening well, even if we are speaking, we are participating in the communication process and demonstrating respect for and connection with the speaker. Active listening brings us into a deeper relationship with another person.

**Respond:** As the person shares feedback with you, listen closely. Allow the person to share his or her complete thoughts without interruption. When he or she is done, repeat back what you have heard. For example, “Do I hear you saying that you want ways to improve students’ homework?” At this point, avoid analyzing or questioning the person’s assessment; instead, just focus on understanding his or her comments and perspective. Give the benefit of the doubt here. Hey, it’s difficult to give feedback to another person. Recognize that the person giving you feedback may be nervous or may not express his or her ideas perfectly.

**Play the Devil’s Advocate:** Plenty of educators will still tell you that devil’s advocacy isn’t just useful as a practical matter but also as an intellectual exercise. Imagining other perspectives and plumbing their workings is essential to critical thinking, and it can help the conversation envision difficulties before they arise.

**Don’t be afraid of being wrong:** Working as educators we often get the idea that we should possess the answers because we are guiding young minds. When we collaborate and discuss elements of our practice with our neighbor teachers, we can also throw out ideas to be vetted by others. Feedback will help us shape our thoughts into successful practices before we experiment with them in the classroom.

The one thing teachers don’t need is to feel more isolated. Teachers need to collaborate, problem-solve, and share successes often. This should happen in classrooms, meetings, and PLC’s but also and especially in conversations between teachers. Academic conversations among peers create both a professional atmosphere and supporting relationships. Look into my classroom, and tell me what you think. Let’s you and I have a discussion. I welcome it.



# ANNOUNCEMENTS, AWARDS, NEWS, AND NOTES

- *The English Pub* continues to attract new readers. In January first readers from Temple, Texas; Canoga Park, California; Harrisonburg, Virginia; Tampa, Florida; Pocatello, Idaho; Skokie, Illinois; Paignton, United Kingdom; and Percy, Arkansas found us. Let's keep spreading the word. We want to foster connections with every ELA teacher and literacy supporter in our state and many more from around the world.
- Emily Jackson, an editorial assistant in *The English Pub* office and an ACTELA board member who represents our student members, will be graduating with her Bachelor of Arts degree from UAM in May. She is majoring in English with a concentration in literature and looks forward to teaching in her own classroom.
- UAM scholars have been invited to make presentations at conferences in both [Fayetteville](#) and [Shreveport](#). Look for photos and reports on their success in upcoming issues.
- The second Human Library event at UCA will take place on Tuesday, April 14th from noon to 4:00 pm. For more information, see their [Human Library Libguide](#).
- We are still eagerly awaiting a response to the nomination of *The English Pub* for a [2020 Library of Congress State Literacy Award](#). Don't forget to help us hope, and whenever you get a chance, visit the website and post a comment about your favorite newsletter article or LIKE your favorite issues so the committee can see how active our outreach is. Remember to confirm your intention to LIKE.



- University of Arkansas at Monticello is busy preparing for its Spring Career Fair. If your school is looking to hire strong teachers, you can find registration information for recruiting from among their graduates [here](#).



**Membership in ACTELA begins at \$20. Student discounts and lifetime memberships are also available [here](#).**



- Aaron Hall has students working on building and installing Little Free Libraries in his town. He promises to explain in an article he is writing for an upcoming issue. Maybe he will even show us some pictures of the results. Stay tuned for more information.
- The [Folger Shakespeare Library](#), home to the world's largest Shakespeare collection, is eager to support the study of Shakespeare in Arkansas. They have been reading our newsletter and want us to know about two summer professional development opportunities available for teachers as well as an exciting new keynote workshop for NCTE affiliate conferences. Further information is available from [Maryam Trowell](#), Folger's Teacher and Student Programs Manager. Please note that applications for the first of the teacher development programs (which takes place at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia) are due by 1 March 2020. Funding opportunities through NEH stipends and the Folger's donor-supported The Will to Teach fund may cover travel and other expenses for this adventure. Act quickly to indicate your interest. See pages 11 and 12 for descriptions of both professional development opportunities the Folger has on offer.
- Braden Taylor has been selected for membership in Delta Zeta Epsilon, the UAM Foreign Language Honor Society.
- Dr Kay Walter has recently been appointed as the faculty representative of an Intervention Team to coordinate retention efforts for at-risk students at her university.

**ELIZABETH HOFFMAN'S  
WEBINAR TALK ABOUT  
"GETTING STARTED WITH  
1000 BOOKS BEFORE  
KINDERGARTEN" IS  
AVAILABLE [HERE](#).**

**THE ORGANIZATION'S WEBSITE IS [HERE](#).**



# NCTE News

NCTE News

The theme for the [2020 NCTE Annual Convention](#) in Denver, Colorado on November 19-22 will be

## ¡Confluencia!

### *Songs of Ourselves*

**Members who are making plans to attend the convention, [speak up](#). We will arrange to meet up for sharing experiences and suggestions over a meal or a drink.**

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NCTE offers a [toolkit](#) of resources for planning a Read-In this month which includes booklists, promotional materials, and other useful ideas.

If your school is planning or hosting an event, we want to hear about it. Please write and tell us how it goes, and be sure to send pictures!

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An NCTE Communications Internship which will support the 2020 NCTE Convention is available to members of Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society. Find more information about making application [here](#).

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The Promising Research Award is given by the NCTE Standing Committee on Research. The competition is open to individuals who have completed dissertations, theses, or initial independent studies after the dissertation. The deadline to apply for this award is 1 March, so don't hesitate! To find out if you are eligible to apply or for more information, award details from NCTE are available [here](#).

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The Library of Congress and NCTE are hosting a webinar conversation with award-winning poet Willie Perdomo. Find more information [here](#).

# SHAKESPEARE AND THE MAKING OF AMERICA: A TEACHING SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE

Key info:

**WHERE:** Three weeks (June 28-July 18) in Williamsburg, VA. We will all live on campus at the College of William and Mary.

**WHO:** 25 teachers and a hot faculty of Shakespearean scholars, historians, actors/directors, mentor teachers and the staffs of Historic Jamestown and Williamsburg, VA.

**\$\$:** A \$2700 stipend from NEH. Possibility of additional travel funds from the Folger's *Will To Teach Fund* if accepted teachers are in need.

**WHAT and WHY (the quick and dirty):**

We'll investigate through the lens of Early Modern Race Studies: What does history (recently revealed or reconsidered) tell us about Black, brown, Latinx and indigenous people and the roles they played, both in Early Modern Europe and in America before it was America? And how do these overlap and influence that white, English guy who was writing plays at the same time?

We will study history as much as we'll study Shakespeare: *The Tempest* (c.1611), *The Merchant of Venice* (c.1596), John Smith's *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Hath Hapned in Virginia Since the First Planting of that Colony, which is now resident in the South part thereof, till the last returne from thence* (1608); about the Iberian Atlantic and Virginia (1492 and onwards), a selection of runaway slave advertisements (c.1751), the Declaration of Independence (1776), and more.

And we'll focus on the how of teaching Shakespeare to our students with all this new knowledge front and center.

Lots more information is available at <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-making-of-america-2020>

Applications are available at <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-making-of-america-2020/how-to-apply>

## APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 1, 2020

# SUMMER ACADEMY 2020: A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Key info:

- **When:** July 19 – 24, 2020 (one week)
- **Where:** National Building Museum, Washington, DC (Folger is on the road during our building renovation project!)
- **Who:** 30 teachers eager to take a deep dive into...
  - *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—scholarship, live performance, and classroom practice and
  - The Folger Method of teaching, so that ALL students realize the power of language and their own minds!
- **What:** Whether you've never taught Shakespeare or have been teaching *Midsummer* for decades, this academy is for you. Learn how to use the unique and multifaceted resources of the Folger to help all students read closely, interrogate actively, and make meaning from texts. Connect with the real thing yourself—Shakespeare's original language, honest conversations about the hard questions raised by that language, and the latest scholarship and archival discoveries—and learn how to connect your students with the real thing, too. Approach *Midsummer* from a range of perspectives: learn alongside leading scholars, mentor teachers, and fellow participants—as well as artists working on a real live production of the play. Gain engaging, effective strategies that get students unlocking not just *Midsummer* but any complex text. Design new learning experiences that honor, excite, and challenge each and every one of your students. Academy days are jam-packed so that you have the very best, fullest adventure!
- **\$\$:** \$2000 tuition covers materials, some meals, and live theatre. Grants for travel and other unmet needs are available through Folger's donor-supported The Will To Teach Fund.

## WHAT PAST PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO STAY:

- "This was by far the best PD I've ever experienced."
- "Working with the Folger changed my life."
- "I had no idea I could learn so much and transform my teaching so much in just one week."
- "This program will change how I teach not just Shakespeare but everything."
- "I am equipped and empowered to take risks as a teacher and let my students own their learning."
- "This week fed my learner brain, my scholar brain, and my teacher brain."

**APPLY ONLINE** by Sunday, April 12, 2020 <https://www.folger.edu/teaching-shakespeare-institute-summer-academy>

**Join us in Shreveport for a gathering of bright young scholars.**



## **Attention: Research Students and Faculty!**

# **5th Annual Regional Student Scholars Forum**

**Graduate and Undergraduate Students** from Universities in Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas are invited to present research and/or creative work in:

- Arts
- Business
- Education
- Humanities
- Natural Sciences
- Social Sciences

**ORAL OR POSTER PRESENTATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED**

## **Awards for Best Graduate and Undergraduate Paper and Poster!**

**Event Website, Online Registration, and Abstract Submission:**

[www.lsus.edu/offices-and-services/sponsored-research/student-scholars-forum](http://www.lsus.edu/offices-and-services/sponsored-research/student-scholars-forum)



**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

**March 12, 2020**

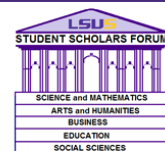
**9am-4pm**

**LSUS University Center  
NO REGISTRATION FEES!**

**Abstracts due  
February 17, 2020**

**FOR MORE INFO, CONTACT:**

**Dr. Sanjay Menon LSU  
Shreveport Dean of  
Graduate Studies  
sanjay.menon@lsus.edu**



# Readers and Writers



Zane Shaw, age 13, oversees trips to the local library for his brother and sister to choose books to read for enjoyment.



Micheal Shaw, age 11, is interested in modern fantasy books.



**Patricia Kulbeth has raised a large family of literacy enthusiasts, and now their interests are passed on to younger generations. Here are three of her great-grandchildren in their local library in Johnson City, Tennessee reaping the rewards of belonging to a family that values reading and writing. Keep it up, young scholars! And when you're ready to undertake college studies, we hope you will consider a university in Arkansas.**

Elliana Shaw, age 8, is interested in books that feature familiar comic book characters



Mammaw Claudia Horton is reading Dr. Seuss's ABC book to her twin grandsons who are wearing their "Thing One" and "Thing Two" shirts.



Jennifer Arce is reading to her son, Evan. His twin brother, Eli, is eager to share the fun of seeing the book.



Claudia Horton's grandson, Evan, is reading one of the many books he emptied off his bookshelf.

# Arkansas Anthology

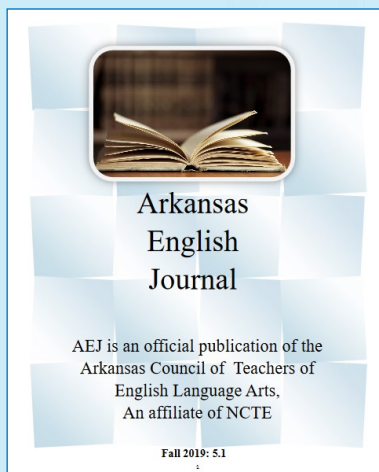
A call for submissions to *Arkansas Anthology 2020* as well as links to past issues are available [here](#).

*Arkansas Anthology 2019* is available as a downloadable file linked to the picture on the right. ACTELA sends congratulations to all our authors and their teachers.

For more information about *Arkansas Anthology*, contact [Aaron Hall](#).

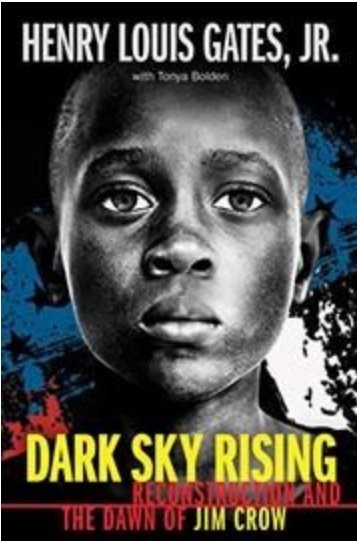


# AEJ 2020



The deadline for submissions for *AEJ 2020* is 1 May 2020. Details and guidelines are available from their [home page](#). The theme for this issue of the journal is Educational Equity: Opportunities for All Students to Succeed. Submissions should be emailed [here](#).





***Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Dawn of Jim Crow* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Tonya Bolden**

**Publisher: Scholastic, Inc**

**Date: 29 January 2019**

**ISBN: 978-1-338-26204-9**

**\$9.99 hardcover: 240 pages**

The book opens with a thesis, or an introduction with a statement of purpose. Dr Gates wants readers to engage in conversation about the information the book contains, which makes it neatly custom-made for a classroom. This book is a great tool to use as a reference in writing, research, and social studies lessons. *Dark Sky Rising* could be a wonderful addition to the history lessons students are learning or have already learned.

There is a lot of information packed into this book, so students should be ready with sticky notes, or page tags to remember where they read a striking quote or important piece of information. There are some concepts that younger readers may struggle to grasp, especially since the recommended reading age for this book is 9-12 years. The idea of “ownership” is simply stated, and the idea of people owning people is presented as a fact of the time in the first chapter and is then explained in more detail later. This may be why some readers have viewed the book as choppy.

Facts about well-known civil rights movement influencers seem scattered throughout the reading rather than being gathered into one place. However, I think this is what makes the book a great additional research tool. *Dark Sky Rising* would be a wonderful addition to young reader’s *previous* research or a wonderful addition to a history teacher’s classroom library.

The photos, quotes, and chapter breaks make the book easy to read and accessible to all. The book may not be *the* book for civil rights research, but it does tell engaging stories of people in history whom we all may not have known from our classroom textbooks but certainly need to know in order to understand the boarder picture of Jim Crow.

**This book review is provided by Emily Jackson, UAM.**

# Keeping up with the Joneses

**Our last installment featured an interview with Dr C. Morrell Jones, the patriarch of a clan of teachers. This time we introduce Billy Jones, his youngest son, who is also a teacher. Mr Jones teaches computer skills to high school students and reflects on the lessons his father has taught him through the years as well as the overlaps between ELA instruction and success in the field he teaches as well as other professions.**

**We've all grown up hearing stories about the Preacher's Daughter. Tell us about being the Teacher's Son.**

Oh, probably the most interesting part is when people think "You just had it so rough. Your daddy must have been so mean to you." No, not really because I knew. It was easier for me because I knew what he expected. I knew that you get the rules and you get the layout. Either you do it or you don't. I had him as a teacher many times. Everything he taught to undergraduates, I took it.

**He was a teacher before you were in college. Did he teach you in public school?**

He was a teacher before I was born. He taught for 61 years.



**Billy Jones is the Computer Engineering Technology Instructor at Southeast Arkansas Community Based Education Center of the Warren School District. Because of his father's work, he has been learning to teach all his life.**

He never was my principal. He was a principal, and he was the superintendent of schools where I went when I was in kindergarten and the first grade. He was the high school principal when I was in second and third grades. He was working with Monticello schools and with UAM when I was in fourth and fifth grades. He never really was the teacher of record when I was in a public school class.

**What about your brothers and sisters, were they in his classes as children?**

None of us ever had him as a “teacher” before college. Now he **has** been into our classes to go through, maybe, a science project or something like that. Oh yeah, we’ve seen him. Now, our children have been studies in his classes. Especially during the summertime when they would come to visit Peepaw and he would take them to class with him and give them whatever he was discussing that day and let them do it while he was having class. I actually got to see some of the lessons where the students would see happening exactly what he told them. He didn’t push the kids to respond; he just gave the task to them. He would tell his students, “If you try this he may do that,” and the kids always did exactly what he predicted. They knew he was Peepaw, so they didn’t care about the lesson. They just reacted and had fun. My kids grew up from a very early age with a lot of people around them, so that didn’t faze them.

**What did you learn about study skills when you were little?**

No doubt grades were important, but by the same token he didn’t ride grades.



**Six monitors, two computers, and one large screen are set up by Mr Jones’s students to represent a police dispatch area for the corrections classes at SEACBEC.**

Success mattered more. For example, his goatee and mustache that you have forever seen. He didn’t have that until my sister was in the fourth grade. She went to school and her teacher had a beard. She wouldn’t go anywhere near him, so Daddy proved to her that it’s just fine. It’s okay. He has had it ever since. That was where that came from. That is one of those things you learn from him by the example he set. Also he had students who were deaf or partially

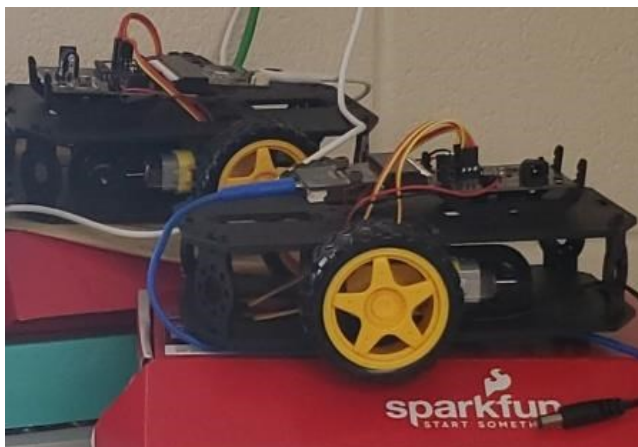
deaf, so when he came home he told us "Be sure you talk to people not talk AT them because if you talk to people where they can see your face they can hear you better." Well, I have a student now who has cochlear implants. He knows me well enough that if I am near him and he doesn't understand me he reaches out and touches me. That means "Mr Jones I didn't hear you and I couldn't see you."

**So you learned a lot of lessons about teaching along the way?**

Oh, Lord, there's no way you can keep from it! He never comes home griping; he just talks about his work. He says, "You know I had a student today who..." He lives what he teaches, there is no doubt about that.

**You spent a lot of years earning a living outside of teaching. What did you miss most about being in the classroom?**

Well, the advantage to my job then was that I didn't miss a whole lot. There were a lot of people coming in, and I knew more about their vehicles than they did. I was still getting to "teach." We do that every day. I don't care who you are, even if you're not a "teacher." The interaction with people is the biggest thing. I love to see kids when all of a sudden learning sinks in. When there is a group of new technicians and you teach them something, suddenly they see it work. So, I missed the AHA moments more than anything. In the classroom, at every grade level, they're there, but sometimes they were there in the other work too. I had to teach my crew to earn a living at their work, or they wouldn't keep doing that job. They would move on to something else.



**The students in his classes experiment with computer-controlled devices.**

**Tell us about your current position.**

We are learning how to build computers, basically desktops though we do others as well. We are also learning CCD, computer-controlled devices, a sort of robotics. I love it when the kids finally see something that says "I can do it." This is true for the computers, the programming,

everything. Most of my kids come to me initially because they don't have anywhere else to be. I don't like that because if they don't want to be there I start off with problems. There are always a few that I still have to work with, but if I can ever get them to the point where they do something that they swore up and down to themselves that they couldn't do, when they are able to do that, then we succeed.

**Tell us the details.**

I teach Computer Engineering Technology. I teach them how to build computers, how to diagnose problems, and the networking situation. Also, I teach online. I have students in up to five different schools at the same time. I work for SEACBEC which is part of the Warren School District—Southeast Arkansas Community Based Education Center. My students are ninth through twelfth graders.

**Define literacy for us in a practical sense rather than giving us a denotation.**

A person who is able to read, for example in my case technical manuals, and get enough information to continue in the work they are doing. Literacy generally considers words, but pictures work as well, anything visual, data, that allows you to complete work or continue learning how to digest that

**Our kids are a lot smarter than even we think they are sometimes.**

information. You have to be able to read it and then to do something with it after you get it so that you know what your next steps will be. Literacy is the ability to digest visual data that allows you to complete or continue a task.

**How do you think literacy is important outside of the ELA classroom, and how do you teach it in your own classroom?**

Very simple. Technical manuals for computers. They aren't in the English classroom, but you have to start from somewhere when you are repairing a computer. You have to have basic literacy skills to have a starting point. Anyone who has the basics and someone who is willing to work with him is going to get better in time if you try.

**What writer or book opened the wonder of reading to you as a child?**

*Where the Wild Things Are!* I remember reading Tolkien. I'm a science fiction buff. I like Heinlein. I prefer books to movies.

**Who's your favorite author?**

Robert Heinlein.

**What's your favorite book?**

I have to go back to *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. That was one of the first books I remember reading.

**What advice do you have for ELA teachers in Arkansas?**

Take your time. Realize that we're in the South and realize the culture is changing. Please don't let the kids get under your skin.



**Mr Jones's classroom is a place where all kinds of students can learn about computer technology.**

**What do you mean by changing culture?**

When I was in school if there was a problem, Mom and Dad went to the teacher to ask "What can we do to help?" Now parents are more likely to say "Why aren't you teaching my child right?" We need to be more in the middle. It's not



**The teacher's desk in this room also holds a busy computer.**

always either one. There is probably an issue there, and we need to find it. The problem may be between the child and the teacher, or it may be between the child and the home. It may be a combination of all of that. It may just be that the child is having a bad day.

### **Are you talking about learning problems or behavioral problems?**

A lot of times what we consider learning disabilities are truly behavioral problems being disguised as other issues. If you have a student that everybody says is a problem child, don't believe it. Wait until you get them and see what's going on. And remember just because they're feisty, that's not the whole story. I've got some students who are absolutely brilliant and can argue with me all day long. They are trying to get away from things they are worried about and scared of. After we argue a minute, I tell them, "You just proved how smart you are because you are able to argue with me over something that has nothing to do with what we are talking about. Ideas just come right to your head. So now let's do this task." The main thing is they aren't truly problems. They have found that is how they can keep from working, so don't let it dissuade you from teaching them. Our kids are a lot smarter than even we think they are sometimes.



**Mr Billy Jones**

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN LITERACY SUPPORT



## INTERVIEW: SPENCER CHASTAIN McGEEHEE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB CEO

by Braden Taylor, UAM

### **What books do you like to read? Do you have a favorite book?**

*I have always enjoyed reading. I just finished the Harry Potter series.*

### **I have never read those books, are they worth the trip?**

*I had not either until October. My fiancée, Katy, would always talk about them. She likes them a lot. I never had a clue what she was talking about, so I figured I would get with the program. Now I have read all of those. I've read a lot of books in that genre, young adult stuff. But I also like a lot of John Grisham and James Patterson. Craig Groeschel is another good author I like to read. I have been reading a lot of marriage books lately and leadership books.*

### **You're the CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of McGehee, could you give an account of what the Boys and Girls Club of McGehee is?**

*The Boys and Girls Clubs as an organization started in the early 1900's with a group of women in Hartford, Connecticut who noticed a group of young boys on the street with nothing to do. They said, "We need to care for these kids. We need to give them a place to go and help prepare them for whatever comes next." So their thought was "see a need, provide a solution." Over the past century and a little it has grown into an organization that at the local level strives to meet a*



**The McGehee Boys  
and Girls Club  
encourages all  
children to read.**



need for three outcomes: academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles. We try and build in a lot of skills and experiences that help the kids reach their goals there at the club. Our mission statement goes into how we exist to help every kid, whether they are a club member or just a kid in the community. We are especially interested in reaching those who are in need, those who need us most, to give them a chance to reach their full potential. We want all kids to become caring, responsible, productive adults. Everything we do stems from that philosophy.

**Literacy is about more than just books. Where and what do you see your club members consuming that might not be considered literacy in the traditional classroom sense?**

*That is a great question. I love that the idea of literacy has grown beyond reading traditional prose and poetry. I think as we grow into a more technological existence there is so much out there beyond that. I remember growing up before cell phones.*

*Every package, shampoo bottle, cereal box that had words on it, we would sit and read. Times have changed so much now that I think kids are still doing that but through their phones. Whether that is social media--for better or worse--I think there are a lot of literacy skills that are built through social media. I think the internet is a great thing. I think that audiobooks are another thing that are not necessarily considered the classical form of literacy, but so many people are auditory learners. I would consider myself one. It is easier for me to listen to a book on a two-hour drive. I can finish a book a lot faster listening to it as I drive than I can by reading it. I think everything from conversational social skills on can help build literacy. I think we try and build in a lot of that in the club whenever we are speaking and modeling literacy. We are building it into games and homework time. As the philosophy of our schools shift away from homework, we're trying to build in activities that develop math and literacy skills. One of the fun*



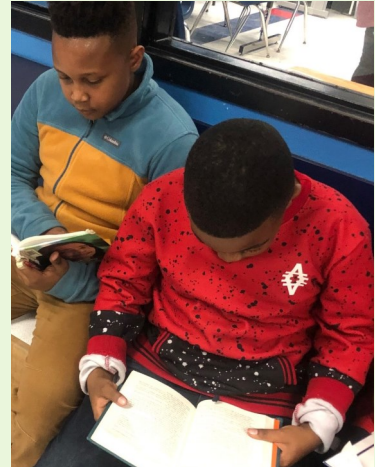
**BUILDING STRONG READING HABITS IS A KEY TO SUCCESS IN SCHOOL AND IN ADULTHOOD.**

**It is hard to be successful in this world if literacy is a challenge.**

*ways we've been doing this recently is we take someone's vocabulary words and we play charades with them. I pull students out, write a word on a whiteboard only they can see, and they have to act it out for their peers. After they guess it, we spell and define the word as a group. I think literacy is built into all we do in many ways people might not notice unless we stop to point them out.*

**Does your club have an onsite library or a place to get books outside of the classroom?**

*We don't have anything necessarily on site, but what we do have is the McGehee library right across the street. We are working on growing that partnership. We already have a great relationship with our local library. Some of our kids participate in that relationship. They go and do activities there. Once they have signed up, they can walk over and read or do programming there. We have a computer lab, so we do have internet access that is online. We do have a few physical books that have been donated. Many students will read these during free time.*



**CHILDREN CAN ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER TO READ FOR PLEASURE AS WELL AS FOR HOMEWORK.**

**Where do you see reading impacting your club members the most outside the classroom?**

*I believe that it is hard to be successful in this world if literacy is a challenge. Even if it is something as simple as street signs, you have to be able to read them. I believe that literacy and reading are vastly important in communication, especially as we get more technological and more and more of our conversations happen via text message and email. I think you have to work through these challenges. Digital communication through text lacks emotion, lacks emphasis to support meaning. Without solid literacy skills it is easy to misinterpret something or read a tone that might not really be there into a message. I think reading no matter what profession, skill, or trade that someone goes into, is absolutely necessary to a basic foundation of literacy. And it is important not just to know how to read but also how to process and understand what you are reading. It is one of the most important skills to long-term success.*

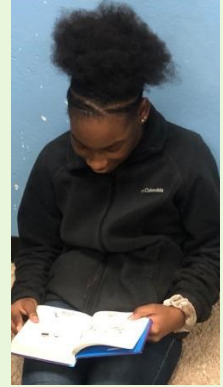


**STRONG READERS MAKE STRONG LEARNERS.**

**Is there anything else that pertains to literacy at the Boys and Girls Club that you would like to share with us?**

*I think the fact that this newsletter goes out to so many people around the world is a testament to the significance and power of reading. I think the Club stands as a unique opportunity to*

*reinforce skills being taught in school. Regarding literacy, especially because what happens at times is at the end of the school day, our kids do not want to do schoolwork. They don't want to read three chapters out of their book, but what they might do is come in and write a script. They might come in and write a dramatic scene. What they might do is read instructions on how to program code for a video game or set up the plot line for a video series. One of the things we've done is some of our teenaged members wanted to do a video series. We called it Teen News Central. We had a group of teenaged girls and boys that would come in and identify things going on in the club. They would write these stories and then record them. All of those things reinforce what they are learning in school and maybe even prepare them for some of the things they are not studying yet. I think we stand in a really unique place to partner with not just the school but other organizations in the community to help reinforce critical points for literacy and communication outside of the 8:00 to 3:00 timeframe where it tends to be expected to happen.*



**THE MCGEHEE  
BOYS AND GIRLS  
CLUB HAS MANY  
COMFORTABLE  
CORNERS FOR  
READING.**



**VISITORS AT THE MCGEHEE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB READ ALL IN A ROW.**

# Global Perspective



**Wesley A. Hall is an ELA Teacher and Prefect Advisor at Clearwater Middle School in Bermuda. He is a husband, father, and recording artist under the name Big Snipes. He completed the Bermuda Teacher Induction Programme (BTIP) in his first two years of teaching and was awarded the 2019 BTIP New Teacher of the Year.**

## Writing from an Island Perspective

by Wesley A. Hall

**Clearwater Middle School, Bermuda**

When I travel overseas, I end up fielding questions from strangers about my homeland. They fall between curiosity and fascination, but sometimes they reveal a lack of common sense. That's what happens when you live on a small, subtropical, pink-sanded paradise to which people seldom refer unless they are planning an exotic vacation or discussing some ancient form of nautical folklore. Yes, I come from Bermuda.

*It's a real place.*

Seven hundred miles off the coast of the United States, Bermuda sits strategically in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Just a two-hour flight from New York's JFK International, and you could be enjoying calm sea breezes and cool drinks, if that is your fancy. Let me reiterate: the Bermuda Triangle is not real, with evidence



provided by the countless immigration stamps in my passport and the thousands of residents and visitors who flock seamlessly to and from our shores. Bermudians are pleasant people, approximately sixty-seven thousand of us on only twenty-two square miles of island space. We are a dependent territory of the United Kingdom, not to be confused with the Caribbean Islands (even though many of our relatives, including my parents, are of West Indian descent).



Bermuda has all of the modern facilities you can expect to find, except for the "Golden Arches" (and only one recognizable fried chicken franchise). Technologically savvy visitors fit in beautifully. Rent a moped or a Twizy and find your own way around the Island. Better yet, plan a hike along our historic railway trails.

*Oh, there is much more to share!*

I am pleased to say that along with other tourist attractions, Bermuda has many educational options from which to choose. Just under five thousand students attend public schools from preschool to high school levels with



private schools, alternative schools, and home school options readily available. We also have Bermuda College, an accredited facility that provides post-secondary options in numerous fields and partners with universities in the US, Canada, UK, and the Caribbean.

Inside our halls of learning, we have students from many ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Such diversity allows for complexities in their

**Mr Hall is a familiar face for students attending Clearwater Middle School in Bermuda.**



**Mr Hall and his students enjoy working together to develop their social and literacy skills.**

thoughts, processing, and discussions. Many of our students have big aspirations fueled by their ingenuity, family traits, or hopes of broadening their scope overseas. You can see it in their expression, particularly in their writing. Their dreams are vibrant, energetic, and passionate. The older they get, the more unique they

become, and before you know it, they grow into another generation of entrepreneurs, skilled workers, or laborers. Bermudian students are inquisitive: many of them learn using multiple learning styles and abilities. They enjoy the outdoors and benefit from experienced adults who relish the opportunity to share their legacy with the next generation. Our educators, to this regard, utilize a variety of methods to capture their students, keep them attentive, and lead them towards life-learning.

We have met many challenges over the years. Our students are heavily influenced particularly by our neighbors in America. It is a familiar saying in Bermuda that "when America sneezes, we catch the cold." Urban antics fueled by the bedazzled hip-hop culture have brought a change in behavior amongst our young people. The family unit has migrated from its traditional form to single-parent or blended families. Open spaces are quickly being developed to accommodate big



**In his classroom, Mr Hall creates an atmosphere which affirms the identity of his students and promotes their social development.**

business. Our population is aging, living longer, and young people are finding it difficult to return home from college to find work in their fields of study. So they leave for school and choose not to come back. And the families that remain here struggle with an economy that is considered one of the most expensive per capita in the world. These challenges are not in isolation; they impact the children in our classrooms just as much as their parents or guardians. I find myself as a new teacher building relationships with students who live through difficult situations at very young ages. There are some tough days.



Mr Hall is a celebrated ELA instructor, shown here receiving one of his many teaching awards.

*I am, however, optimistic.*

Through my quick writes, I hear the voices of young people who choose not to be victims but to be victorious, who choose to ask critical questions for the benefit of others. These are young people who speak through the arts and diligently work so that their entertainment is actually "enter-train-ment" for our community and the world that is watching, while they think beyond the box of their education. And while there are some students who struggle to learn or have made decisions not to take responsibility for their actions, I am pleased to be a part of a family of talented educators who work to ensure that every child is given many opportunities to excel. We strive towards excellence as our mantra has been for years.

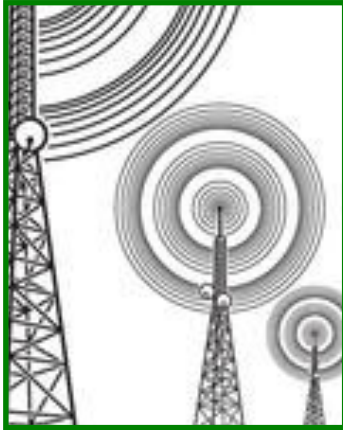
American writer Mark Twain says it best: "Bermuda is the right country for a jaded man to 'loaf' in." Watch this jewel in the Atlantic because, believe me, we are on the rise.



QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS FOR OUR AUTHOR CAN BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR HERE.



# Building Connections



WITH WHOM HAVE YOU SHARED *THE ENGLISH PUB* THIS MONTH? **WRITE** AND TELL US SO WE CAN CELEBRATE THEIR ARRIVAL ON **OUR MAP.**

Arkansas Center  
for the Book  
2020 Nomination  
Library of  
Congress  
State Literacy  
Award

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

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

How often do you see your students reading authors of a racial or ethnic background different from their own? **Write us** and share their favorites.

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