

# 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 question:

What professional organizations are you an active member of and how do these memberships enhance your teaching?

Some of their answers are highlighted on page two. Let us know if you'd like contact information for any of these groups.

Dear ACTELA Members,

As the incoming President of ACTELA, I wanted to take a moment and thank our outgoing president Dr. Dixie Keyes, for her wisdom, laughter, and infinite patience. I also want to thank our ACTELA board members for their hard work and dedication to the education profession.

ACTELA accomplished a lot this past year, we have a "Teacher for the Dream," our newsletter received an award from NCTE, and we were featured by NCTE for our use of the Literacy

and Learning Exchange by our board and we presented on this topic at NCTE.

In 2016 our ACTELA board would like to focus on engaging our members, highlighting teacher accomplishments, and finding more opportunities to advocate for Arkansas teachers. We welcome your



ideas and comments! Please feel free to email me at

[cindy.green@virtualarkansas.org](mailto:cindy.green@virtualarkansas.org)  
*Cindy Green, ACTELA President*

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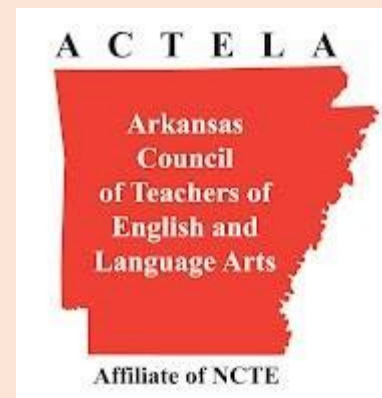
## We Want to Connect!

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

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

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Arkansas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts



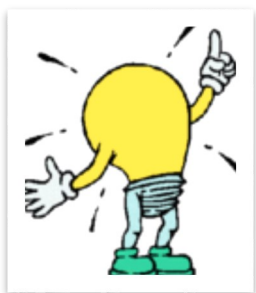
# Networking



Gathering with other professionals to share ideas, research questions, and best practices is a necessary part of teaching English and Language Arts effectively. Because we spend every day sharing our knowledge and helping students master new information, we must make time to take in inspiration and fill our own emotional, social, and academic needs. ACTELA Board members were recently asked to discuss what professional organizations they gather with to find such inspiration. Here are some of their answers:

- ◆ I am a member of the International Literacy Association (ILA). Each month I receive its publication where I learn innovative ways of teaching reading and writing to my middle school students. This membership helps me learn what is happening in the field of education in regards to literacy. I also get to hear from different authors and learn about new books that will interest my students. Melinda Francis
- ◆ I'm only involved with ACTELA AND NCTE at the moment :) Cindy Green
- ◆ I'm mostly active in literary societies: Charles Lamb Society, Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club, Friends of Ruskin's Brantwood. I'm also on the Readers Panel of the National Trust. These communities of scholars inform my teaching of British literature and provide a support network for my own research and scholarship. I'm also a Companion in the Guild of St George and active in the Carson McCullers Society, and I've just joined ALAN. All these organizations represent a panel of experts for my students to contact in their research too! Kay Walter
- ◆ I'm a teacher consultant with the Northwest Arkansas chapter of the National Writing Project. Being a part of a NWP site offers so many great ways to help spread the word about quality writing instruction and network with like-minded educators! Tyler McBride
- ◆ I am a part of the Southern Early Childhood Association. This organization uses everyday to improve quality of care and early childhood education. Also, help families and children through Professional Development. Brycial Williams

- ◆ I'm active in ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE) and have been a state representative for a number of years. They have a two-day conference attached to the end of NCTE. This is where I found Mike Mullin and Matthew Quick. Dixie Keyes
- ◆ Arkansas Association of Instructional Media - I am a member of this organization and attend its annual conference each year. Each year I am challenged by the new technology presented in the session. I come away each year with a new method, app, gadget, or website to add to my teaching tool belt. Jeff Wittingham
- ◆ As a member of the Apple Distinguished Educator program I have access to a global community of educators that are working in innovative ways. These educators provide me with feedback and support in my own practice and challenge me constantly to seek new ways to provide innovative resources for my students and for other educators. This community also provides me with opportunities for digital authorship. Jessica Herring
- ◆ As an active member of ACTELA, I have been able to meet wonderful educators from across the state. As the ACTELA program chair for the Arkansas Curriculum Conference, I have the opportunity to impact teachers by selecting quality sessions and professional development for the ACC. The collaboration and enthusiasm that comes with being an active ACTELA member is priceless. Sunny Foster
- ◆ While ACTELA and NCTE are the primary focus of my professional involvement with the field, I have also been a member of the IRA/ILA and our Arkansas chapter, ARA. Membership in the ILA has been a crucial piece of my teaching as their standards guide the programs that I teach in as a professor, and have been a part of the accreditation efforts that are an ongoing element of educator preparation programs. Ryan Kelly
- ◆ I am a member of the International Literacy Association, ASCD, and Association for Mid-Level Education (AMLE). The most worthwhile benefits gained from my memberships are the immediacy in which I receive the latest information regarding policies, instructional strategies, and resources. It would be quite daunting to gather all of this information on my own, and I would be limited in how quickly I am able to share such information with my teachers and their students. It is also an enormous boost to my endeavors to have such a well-founded support network in place. I can reach out to several sources whenever I am faced with a particular quandary that needs to be remedied. These memberships have help prevent me from becoming burned-out and over-stretched. Dawn Bessee



# What about you?

What professional organizations inspire you and help to shape your teaching? Send contact information to our newsletter editor to share with the other members of our organization.

# ACC

## LOOKING BACK



ACC 2015 featured a new Roundtable Session for Preservice Teachers to present the findings of their research. Thirteen students from the University of Arkansas at Monticello made their debut professional presentations at their initial conference experience. They provide us with a glimpse of the future of our discipline and a unique view of our organization in their responses.

- The ACTELA conference was a great experience. It was really helpful to meet other teachers who could answer questions I had concerning the English field. The Roundtable discussion was something completely new for me- but I'm glad I had the opportunity to research and prepare. It was a bit nerve-wracking, but now I know I'm capable of presenting quality work. **Kayla Luff**
- The conference was a great experience. I feel as if it went very well. I wish that we could have been able to experience the entire conference! **Callie Parker**
- I really enjoyed my time presenting at the round table discussion ! This was a great opportunity to gain experience and understanding in the conference realm of the education world. I was able to open myself up and try something I never would have thought to, providing me with better public speaking skills and knowledge of how to prepare and present for a public discussion. **Kelley Taylor**
- I, myself, was very nervous. I didn't know what the professors were specifically looking for. As the presentations commenced the attention and respectfulness of the judges washed away my fears. The judges were extremely kind and they offered sound advice back from our presentations. They took the points I made and helped me form new and more solid ideas on how to teach complex texts in a more effect and critical way. One sentence that stuck with me from my entire experience, working on the creation of the roundtable presentation until I received my grade, was that a true representation of a person's intelligence is not the amount of information they can regurgitate, but the quality at which a person can create new ideas by using the information given to them. **Mark Sullivan**

**Keep up the good work, Scholars! We look forward to seeing you at next year's gathering and can't wait to see what our next preservice group has to share.**





Dawn Bessee and Cindy Green greet English teachers at the ACTELA membership table at ACC.

# NCTE 2015

## ARKANSAS IN MINNEAPOLIS

ACTELA was well represented at NCTE's annual convention this year, and we brought home awards along with our memories. Our newsletter was recognized, and we were recognized for receiving a Teacher for the Dream grant. In addition, we found ourselves enjoying the highlights of a wonderful experience among a host of English and Language Arts teachers. Responses from some of the conferences goes will encourage you to make plans to join us in Atlanta this year!

## Dixie Keyes on the Exhibit Hall:

We veteran NCTE annual conference attendees plan for our visit(s) to the Exhibit Hall, specifically and intentionally. Any efficient conference-goer knows the in's and out's of the huge exhibit halls. Vendors from *Scholastic* to *Pearson* to *Heinemann* to *Penguin* anticipate what teachers want and need, and they deliver: attractive, sturdy bookbags; attention-getting bookmarks; imaginative posters of books; free pencils and pens; gift basket drawings; and even candy! But most coveted are the stacks of free books, one per teacher, that sit in front of our favorite authors. We all know that free book will end up in our classroom library or in the hands of a student, and having the author's signature in a book means the world to any young reader who may not leave her hometown until she's an adult. We find many serendipitous moments in the Exhibit Hall too—it's a place of magic when you meet a new friend as you stand in line for a Meg Medina novel. We feel the dizzying whimsy of literature love when someone beside you mentions that Ruta Septys is signing around the corner—how did I miss that in the program? Then, the finale comes when we lug our three new, overflowing book bags to the concession stand for a pretzel with nacho cheese sauce (or some chicken tenders) and a diet, no regular, Coke. Then we plop down next to a wall with our teacher friends to empty our bags and compare take-aways as if it's Christmas afternoon. And last, we write down our favorite moments of the conference on the cool whiteboard areas set up by NCTE. Hope to see you in the Exhibit Hall next year in Atlanta!

## Sunny Styles-Foster on Downtown Connections: The Minneapolis Skyway:

When I first heard that NCTE 2015 would be held in Minneapolis in November, my first reaction was, "Brrrrrr!" I knew I would spend most of my time inside enjoying powerful sessions from some of the best educators from across the nation, but as with any conference out of town, you always hope to eat at a local restaurant or take in a few sights. The thought of walking around all bundled up and hoping that my feet would thaw out did not sound appealing. Apparently, Minnesotans have it all figured out...The Skyway!

The Skyway is a meandering maze of elevated, indoor, climate controlled pedestrian walkways. The Skyway system connects over 11 miles in the downtown area! My experience with the Skyway was one of amazement. It was not only climate controlled, which made my walk to the conference much more pleasant, but it was also quicker than walking outdoors. I was fortunate to be only a five minute walk from the convention center, while others had a bit more of a trek from the center of downtown. Once you entered the convention center, you had to walk through to the other side in order to connect to the next walkway. Throughout the Skyway there were signs indicating which streets you were crossing and arrows guiding you to the correct turns and paths. Along the Skyway there was also various restaurants, coffee shops, and stores. This proved to be beneficial since the coffee line at the convention center would often fill up quickly. I found a wonderful breakfast spot on the walkway, just past the convention center. I was able to walk down (or should I say UP), grab a bite, and make it back for the early sessions! My only complaint was that the Skyway did close at 9:30pm. Some areas remain open, but if you aren't already in the Skyway, you will not be able to gain access. A few of us found this out after dinner one evening. Needless to say, the scenario of being bundled up and hoping that my feet would thaw came to fruition!

## Cindy Green on Documentary Sessions:

As an English teacher, of course I love books, but a close second is film and I adore films about or connecting to literature. My first NCTE ever, was this past November of 2015. I could not have been more excited, and could not wait to see what unfolded for me in Minneapolis. On Saturday of the conference, NCTE offered film screenings all day. The films presented could all be used as a foundation or catalyst for study in the classroom.

Opening the screening day was *NOW in the Wings on a World Stage* from Academy Award Winners Kevin Spacey and Sam Mendes. The film follows Spacey and the Bridge Project Company as they travel across three continents performing Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Spacey's interpretation of this classic is mesmerizing and the bond created with the cast and crew really highlights how great works of art bring people together. In the classroom, discussion

*August Wilson: the Ground on Which I Stand* is a documentary on the Tony-and- Pulitzer winning playwright August Wilson. Having taught *Fences* before, I had only brushed the surface of the life of this man. The film highlights Wilson's plays and life; I never knew each of his plays represented a different decade in the lives of African Americans.



These are just a couple of the films I watched that day in Minneapolis, but I loved these films and cannot wait to use them in my classroom. If you want to learn more about the films I viewed, or others presented at the screening, the list of films and teaching materials are located at <http://nctescreeingroom.weebly.com/>

### Dawn Bessee on Using Inquiry to Better Serve our Teachers:

ACTELA board members shared their process of building capacity with other state affiliates at the 2015 NCTE conference. By using the “Literacy in Learning Exchange” tools as a way to communicate and collaborate with one another online, ACTELA members began an inquiry process. The group set out to with a mission to think of ways to enhance the affiliate’s continuity, service, and leadership at the state and regional levels. Online conversations allowed for members to address initial 2012 inquiry questions regarding an expanded, more diverse board and the group’s interactions with the Arkansas Department of Education. The following year, an additional inquiry question arose regarding ways that ACTELA could possibly increase its membership numbers via providing services to classroom teachers and the scheduling of regional events. ACTELA members continued the inquiry process into the spring of 2015 and discussed ways to maintain synergy throughout the year, replicate NCTE activities at the state and regional levels, and continue the quest for building capacity.

The inquiry process used by the group follows the format outlined by the NCLE Inquiry Guide: Observe, Plan, Act, and Reflect. The members then took their observations and conversations through the lens of the Realm of Concern and Realm of Influence tool (designed by Daniel Baron) to determine what concerns were within the influence and purview of the board. The results of the entire process included welcoming new board members, recognizing the Teacher for the Dream recipient (a new award for the state), enhancing a social media outreach, and establishing the Arkansas English Journal. Additional new actions included revisions to the Policies and Procedures Handbook for ACTELA, an increase in the number of people involved, and the use of Facebook and the listserve to consistently enhance communication across the state. Based on reflections and the success of the Inquiry process thus far, the board now looks to planning their next steps and inquiries: how does ACTELA move forward? How can the Inquiry process be used to guide and plan regional events?

At the conclusion of the presentation itself, ACTELA board members provided documents for the participants to view and mingled with attendees to facilitate discussions as to how other state affiliates could possibly build capacity using the Literacy in Learning Exchange and the Inquiry model. In all, the board members did an excellent job in demonstrating how the group is building capacity for the organization and continuing to work toward serving the state’s teachers of literacy. It is a model that other state affiliates could very easily replicate.

**Rob Lamm (left) and Kay Walter (right) present Linda Arnold with the Carolyn Pitman Lifetime Achievement Award**



**Rob Lamm presents Brycial Williams with ACTELSA's first Teach for the Dream Award**

# **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Your ACTELA Board members will be gathering for the annual retreat early in March. Now is the time to suggest issues you'd like them to consider.

# **LOOKING FORWARD**

## **ACC AND NCTE 2016**

Board members have already submitted proposals for sessions at NCTE in Atlanta, and they are busy submitting proposals for sessions for ACC now. If you have a session topic to share, or if you have a topic you'd like board members to address, let us know!



# Opportunity Knocks



Opportunities for us and for our students to exercise writing skills abound. Here are a few with upcoming deadlines. ACTELA members and their students are encouraged to participate in all of them. We want to celebrate some prize winners from Arkansas!

- 2016 Sejong Writing Competition Deadline 29 February 2016  
[www.sejongculturalsociety.org/writing](http://www.sejongculturalsociety.org/writing)
- 3rd Annual Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center Short Story Contest Deadline 1 April 2016 information at  
[adamlong@astate.edu](mailto:adamlong@astate.edu)
- Barnes & Noble My Favorite Teacher Contest Deadline 1 March 2016  
[www.bn.com/myfavoriteteacher](http://www.bn.com/myfavoriteteacher)

**If you or your students have recently won a writing contest, let us know, and we'll include a gallery of Arkansas honors in upcoming newsletters.**

Do you know of other writing contests? Send us information, and we'll share!



# Global Perspective

## Teaching in Rwanda

**Dr. Alayne Zimmerly, University of Arkansas at Monticello**

As a university professor, I welcome opportunities to find out if I still have the abilities to go into a classroom and actually teach younger students. Over several years, I have been given several opportunities to experience teaching in other cultures. One opportunity allowed me to travel to Kigali, Rwanda to teach model lessons for primary school teachers in real world classrooms. Even though I found many challenges, these experiences have been some of the most rewarding ones of my educational career.

Teaching in Kigali, Rwanda was a very unique experience. The focus of the experience was to teach basic English-speaking skills to students who had little background in the language. One of my jobs prior to traveling to Kigali was to write curriculum appropriate for primary age children. This was quite a challenge because I had no idea about the culture of the students. I was told that we would have about forty students in a classroom with no electricity, no technology, and no supplies with which to teach. Even though I planned for basic emerging literacy skills, at that time, I had no idea had little English the students could understand. Teachers in Kigali basically wrote “lessons” on the board in English. Students copied from the board and took exams based on the lessons copied in English. Students did not “study”; they “memorized.” What a challenge for me to go into a classroom and teach a fairly coherent lesson in a way in which I never taught!

Of course, as with most teaching experiences, I “modified and adapted” my lessons when I actually got to the classrooms. Most of the lessons were acceptable but some things were quickly done away with. Some of the words in the vocabulary were not words that the children knew and understood. (We quickly found out that these people only ate one meal a day. Breakfast and lunch had no meaning for them.) We spent a lot of time “acting out” vocabulary words, bringing lots of laughter not only from the students but, also, other teachers. These students had no idea of working cooperatively—much less room to get in circles or move about the room. The only “teaching tool” we had was a small whiteboard (18-inches by 24- inches) and markers. These students loved games which



we quickly adapted to the vocabulary words. (We used bean bags made of socks and filled with beans from the local open market.) It was an amazing experience to teach without all the “tools” we think teachers must have in our classrooms in America.

The first trip I made to Kigali helped me to understand some of the changes



**DR. ALAYNE ZIMMERLEY  
WITH SOME OF HER  
RWANDAN SCHOLARS**

I needed to make in order to do a better job on the second trip. However, we taught in totally different circumstances the second time. Initially, we had taught in the public schools and, the second time, we taught in private schools. Even though many things were different, some things were still the same. Teachers wanted to learn better ways to teach the students

and manage classrooms. Students were amazingly like our students here. Languages and culture was different but I saw many commonalities. The smiles on the children’s faces kept me going.

In spite of the challenges, the rewards for this experience were amazing. I learned that you do not have to have fancy “tools” to teach children. Good teaching relies not so much on the ability to use these tools but on adaptability and knowing who your students are. The most important thing I learned is that even though I went to Rwanda to “teach” students, I was actually the one who learned the most from them. If you ever have the opportunity to teach in a place different from your normal, everyday situation, I highly recommend you take it. You will never be the same. It changes everything!



**DR. Z TEACHING HER  
RWANDAN CLASS**

# Making Connections



Have plans to attend a conference this semester, ACTELA? Professional travel is a vital form of education that encourages networking and learning beyond the classroom. Tell us where you are going and what you hope to bring back to share with your students and colleagues.

## Email Contacts for Questions/Comments

Membership

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Anthology Submissions

[dkeyes@astate.edu](mailto:dkeyes@astate.edu)

Teacher Initiatives

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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)