Spotlight on Language, Literacy and Literature
A Newsletter of the ASCD Network

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Building Literacy Strategies by Exploring the Connection Between Cultural Influences, Italian Folklore and Children’s Literature
(Professor Esther Fusco)
This course considers the influence of society and culture on children’s literature and the development of literacy. Folktales, myths and tall tales are stories about people and their nature. They find their way into American literature from a variety of sources. This course explores the Italian influence on various aspects of American literature and relates these influences to other cultures.

For more information, please call Martin Slus at (516) 463-5389 or Dr. Esther Fusco at (516) 463-7004.

Dear Friends,

A new year for each school family begins with anticipation, expectation, dedication – and too – trepidation. Teachers, administrators and students in all grades experience the range of personal hopes, wishes and fervor. Combined, the pre-school of a school reflects abundant human energy!

“In the beginning was the word” – from traditional text and so it is … the initial “welcome,” “good morning,” “hello,” “my name is” – with a smile sets the tone – and so the school year begins.

You have done it all! Some of our newer Network members will become familiar with this “Blue” newsletter of selected information for readers’ use.

Please respond on the enclosed questionnaire indicating your preferences for information. Your words and thoughts are important!

Do focus some of your attention on the approaching federal legislation regarding the renewal of No Child Left Behind. The law’s unspoken principle is the serious commitment to “learning-for-all” that can hinder the remedy. The law itself is a page turner. This is one such book, and it should be at the top of your reading lists. The focus of the book is on education’s commitment to business profit and the loss of our commitment to civic responsibility. It explains “how political ideologies of three presidential administrations found common ground in the rejection of American liberalism, enabling science and business to work dialectically in order to reestablish the authority of the one best method of teaching reading in American classrooms” (p. 97).

Shannon is passionately concerned about the teaching of reading. He convincingly asserts that there is no such thing as one method of reading and writes that administers texts as an indicator of teaching achievement is a pretense designed to disguise the government’s agenda to withhold federal funds from children with special needs and those in poverty. The author’s message is that we as an educational community must expose this charade and restore the promise to educate America’s children.

Under our current system, basals have become the key to effective reading instruction, and their successful adoption by any of the “big three” states of Texas, California or Florida represents a financial windfall for the textbook companies. It is important to note that the new testing has spawned an annual $2.3 billion budget, which is a small part of the $500 billion spent annually on education. Of the $2.3 billion, 90 percent of this money goes to five companies – Pearson Education Measurement, ETS, CTB/McGraw-Hill, Harcourt Assessment and Houghton Mifflin. Not only do these companies produce the tests, but they produce the materials to support the test preparation.


Reading Against Democracy is a must read book. Rarely do you find an education book that is a page turner. This is one such book, and it should be at the top of your reading lists. The focus of the book is on education’s commitment to business profit and the loss of our commitment to civic responsibility. It explains “how political ideologies of three presidential administrations found common ground in the rejection of American liberalism, enabling science and business to work dialectically in order to reestablish the authority of the one best method of teaching reading in American classrooms” (p. 97).

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Shannon asserts that NCLB is putting an end to our country, our test scores have remained steady. Literate populace, that annual testing raises achievement scores will improve teachers’ reading test scores or that quotas for gains in annual testing scores. He states that we have been evidence-based acts that are supposed to improve the future of education? Can reading ability individual interests and teacher talents become children? Has the factory model devoid of national government in our educational system. He con-

Shannon reminds us that many of those who supported the government in the takeover of reading instruction was replaced with the government in the takeover of reading instruction. He states that many of those who supported the government in the takeover of reading instruction have profited from their support. The profits have come in the form of grants, textbook editions, and commercial successes.


Unique birds and colorful illustrations accompany this creative math book of word problems and riddles. Addition, subtraction, multiplications and division are divided to solve the problems, and answers can be found at the bottom of each page.


Pizza is at the heart of this book about counting, adding, multiplying and fractions. Fascinating pizza facts and creative pizza toppings make this educational book fun and exciting.


As the chickens dance the night away, readers are treated to one of their favorite counting rhymes, a bright and colorful book that encourages children to count and dance along.


This uniquely illustrated book shows the actual size, with measurements, of some of the smallest animals and animal parts. It also provides some information about each animal.

Too Good to Miss


Here is a book that can delight many readers and listeners. It is a fine read-aloud for the early reader, an independent high-interest for the beginning reader who responds to text and rhyme-and also, an especially delightful read-aloud for the reluctant reader to younger listeners.


Based on the Oscar Wilde fairytale of 1888, this retelling is a gem of literature. We recommend it again, for those who may have missed the initial review. The nuances of shared feeling, of empathy at many levels, are excellent for discussion of personal values, sense of community and more.


The reporter of September 11th and Kennedy Assassination has told the full reporter’s story of the critical era in the current, continuing political issues. Reader-friendly for middle grades and up.


Shall we do it? collection of eerie tales of troubling and griped characters. High-interest stories by a recognized author who grasps the interest of teen readers.

Jeffers, Oliver. (2007). The Incredible Book Eating Boy. NY: Greenwillow Books. This delightful tale of the boy who ate books until he discovered books were fun to read.


A delightful tale of familiar creatures demonstrates the best of human relations in meaningful context. (For younger readers.)


For the middle grade reader who enjoys reading about the actual characters and situations, this is a perfect read, especially for girls.


A newly revised biography with photographs of the “richest man in the U.S.” perhaps in the world. Bill Gates started his remarkable career while in high school. High-interest reading for a wide range of students.


Simple text and collage illustrations will draw young readers’ attention to the world around them. This is a truly unique book of color, form and majesty of nature.


For young readers, Elize’s encounter with kindergarten presents a familiar situation of separation from Mommy. Her solution is satisfying.

Naylor, Phyllis. (2007). Simply Sarah Simpson, who loves to get big ideas that will solve problems, does come up with the right idea to get her friend a gift. This delightful chapter book is fine fiction for elementary to middle grades.

Continued on back page.
The author urges readers to “speak out” to encourage decision makers to re-examine the policies concerning young learners.


The natural state of toddlers and young children is motion, and Beverly Abramson’s splendid photographs are an appreciation of the many ways in which we can move. Children spin and whirl, run, jump and climb through the seasons in photographs that beg for discussion and storytelling. Whether it is flying a kite or kicking a ball, slipping on the grass or riding a tricycle, Beverly Abramson has captured kids experiencing the sheer pleasure of exploring the world through movement.

Chauncey, Carolene. (2005). Recruiting, Retaining and Supporting Highly Qualified Teachers: Challenges and Opportunities. 

A tool kit for principals and administrators to improve the quality of classroom teaching. Thirty (30) percent of teachers have their jobs within three years, 50 percent within five years. The book provides an overview of cultural factors that shape teaching; examines preparation of teachers and their abilities in practice; and assesses strategies, including induction programs, careers for teachers, school-based coaching, and effective supervision.


Education policy today, both federal and state, mandates a variety of steps intended to guarantee that all students are taught by knowledgeable and skilled teachers. The cornerstone of current federal education policy – the No Child Left Behind Act – requires teachers to be “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom by 2005. CBEE and AACTE created STEP in 1996; since then, 25 colleges and universities in five states have partnered with the multiple approaches developed by the STEP campuses offer exemplary models to states and other institutions wanting to improve the quality of their new teachers.

STEP is based on three principles: 1) Teachers must know the subjects they are teaching; 2) Teachers must know how to teach; and 3) Teachers must know how to monitor and assess how well students are learning.

Table 1.3 Evidence of Teacher Candidate Quality:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs of the program</th>
<th>Performance of candidates</th>
<th>Results with students (p. 32, STEP Report, 2005)</th>
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An introduction to pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, half dollars and dollars, this rhyming book teaches about counting money, adding money and trading money.


Gonk the toad and Beezy the lizards are competing to see who can make better graphs in this educational math book. Gonk and Beezy create bar graphs, Venn diagrams, pie charts and more, based on the interests of children. The back of the book provides explanations of graphs and instructions for making one.


Personified numbers climb and then fall out of an apple tree in this counting story. In addition to its vibrant colors, the book includes counting forward from one to 20, counting backward from tens to 90 to 20, and even addresses zero and 100.


One, two, three and four digits numbered with addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, present 100 different ways to add the number 100 in this interactive book.


As the bug army attempts to form perfectly even rows with 25 bugs each, Soldier Joe is repeatedly left as the “remainder of one.” After many failed efforts, Joe finally figures out what to do in such a way that yields no remainder.


A short book that counts using dinosaurs and the house hold items they might enjoy. The book also educates about dinosaurs, as it includes the scientific names for each one shown.

The Top Job

If It Weren't for You

Emilie Osborne Bednarchuk

Winding Creek Elementary School

Stafford, Virginia

This is a wonderful book about sibling relationships. While simply told, it carries a real understanding of the connections between siblings.

If It Weren't for You

By Charlotte Zolotow

Illustrated by G. Brian Karas

HarperCollins Publishers

New York, 2007

This is an amazing book for those who love baseball and those who are collectors. The book tells the story of how the books that held the ball that Babe Ruth once hit to a home run. While I am not a baseball fan, I got chills reading some of this book. It really is...
touch of history from a different perspective. I loved all the wonderful pictures.

Sitting Bull
By Ann Turner
HarperCollins Publishers
New York, 2007
How it worked to be?
This is a very inviting story as we daydream with Sitting Bull. He remembers what it was like when the Sioux Nation had its first contact with the battles between the Sioux and the U.S. government are well presented.

How Animals Use Their Senses
By Pamela Hickman
Kids Can Press Ltd.
Towanda, NY, 2006
This is an interesting informational book that invites readers to explore how animals use their senses. All can recognize features of lasting quality. It is a most well-illustrated book.

For Your Interest
Book Links, 15th anniversary issue, July, 2006, “Celebrating the Closest Readers”
A resource of familiar and respected titles, illustrations and recaps of the timeless delights.

For high-interest, critically acclaimed books for teens, several of which have sparkled films, seek out books by Meg Cabot, who also writes for adults. Look for Avalon High, Princess Diaries, and Mediator series (HarperCollins).


Using simple concepts of science, these books answer questions about wind, rain and snow and encourage young readers to explore their surroundings anew. Look for Who Likes the Snow? Who Likes the Sun? Who Likes the Wind?

For the early reader, seek out the Kids Can Read series of high-interest stories and inspiring biographies by Eric Lively (Helen Keller and Alexander Graham Bell). Available for levels three of reading ability and interest.

For the young tween, the new series Planet Girl offers project instructions for creative handwork in book four: Fully Woolly.

Teen Manga is a new series from HarperCollins, which has added Tokyo Pop to Harterman. Manga in Japanese means “comics” and the books are written in a comic book style of pictures and “bubbles” of text. Miki is the first available with Miki summer and Miki spring titles.

For more good books:

Filled with romance and humor, this coming-of-age novel reveals the timeless concerns of a young girl who was to become the enduring author of famous novels. This is a gift of a read for teens that harbors writing skills – and a reader of Jane Austen novels.


A celebration of dogs and canine world, with many breeds described for special responses and behaviors. With spirited illustrations, Dog Poem is an affectionate and humorous look at “man’s best friend.” A treat for middle grade readers – especially dog lovers.

This small book, complete with index and glossary, offers detailed information on the physical description of familiar and not-so-familiar animal defecation. It provides a natural rationale for the common function, which provides an easier approach to the common experience for all readers.

The paperback edition of the 2003 edition is complete in its detailed eloquence of photos, text, personal accounts, and index. Hampton has created a book for all ages.

The setting of the World War II economy prevents the luxury of the usual Christmas tree, text, and an innovative approach proves to be an unexpected joy. Junior converts a discarded plant into a lavish tree with the participation of neighbors in the apartment house. This story is a reminder of the Stone Soup tale – with true and real events.

With a wondering sense of movement and color, this usage book invites children to explore their world with delight and curiosity. Young readers will open the pages to find the science of rain and related topics clearly explained: why rain falls, what raindrops look like, why air smells different in rain – and more!

The retelling of this Jewish folklore reminder invites readers of the first Chanukah and Matthass’s bravery in protecting his faith. The elegant prose is complemented by Neil Waldman’s logical ink and watercolor illustrations.

This starting art series for the young in art encourages play and experimentation with everyday materials and tools and opens the creative spirit in every young child. Uniquely clear, step-by-step, illustrated techniques. Projects lead to discovery and a sense of accomplishment.

Awe-inspiring, full-color photographs join cool facts and ingenious experiments. With light humor, the author brings the thrill of discovery to life. At last, luminous separates light on the adventure of science. A gem for middle grades and higher.

An excellent source of information presented in reader-friendly text with explicit illustrations, this book is for adults and children. More than 60 items are described.

Adapted from a beloved I. L. Peretz story, Richard Unger captures the Josephus spirit of the Jewish folktales with humor and vibrant color. Excellent middle grade fiction/ethnic folklore. Author offers interesting personal study of art, writing and law.

Familiar author and artist have produced an appealing bedtime reading that invites young authors – and artists – in the classroom to highlight other times of a youngster’s day.

The interactive use of the pull tab which requires paper-over-board encourages learning about fall and the colorful jack-o-lanterns and falling leaves.

From the heralded hardcover, this unabridged board book by the well-known producer, explodes with the energy of childhood and toddler surrealism. The reader and parent concern with the patience and unconditional love of parent.

The Backyardigans celebrate (the reader’s delight) with 18 pages to reveal gifts. The stick-shaped board book adds to the festivities. (TV tie-in)

With her baby brother Sprinkle, Blue shows how special it is to be a big sister or brother. (TV)

Large format board book of favorite adventures includes a mini bilingual board book on inside back cover with Dora’s drawings. (TV)

Dora’s Dance Pop-up. Different kinds of dancing are explored with Dora in the pop-up in every spread. This is a delight for young “readers” (TV)

Love is everywhere with Mandy Stanley – berries, rabbits, ants. But who does Owl love? Here is a loving song for the youngest.

Board Books
This delectable board book is a delightful invitation to bedtime reading and a delightful morsel of sibling devotion.

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Young Readers
Here are the basics of autobiographical writing for middle graders. The guide is encouraging and provides specific ideas for selecting and ordering information. The book may inspire those who haven’t yet thought about writing.

This is a feel-good book designed to help families cope with the pang of separation anxiety. From “sleep over” to school, young readers share positive feelings of separation from the familiar setting.

This colorful etiquette book is a delightful reading experience for the youngest readers and a fine read-aloud for the older reader. A fine discussion starter in sharing experiences.

Congratulations to HarperCollins Children’s Books on the 50th anniversary of the “I Can Read” Series. These stories have set standards for early readers. From humor to history, poetry to sports, nature to adventure - “I Can Read” helps young readers to love reading. It all started with the 1957 publication of the non-classic Little Bear! Also, look for Amelia Bedelia and so many more!

Professional Development
From Reading Today (International Reading Association) August/September (p. 20). Mimi Brooks Chendek, Handicapped in Reading. “We have permit- ted developmentally inappropriate practice to become realtities, squeezing the joy from children’s early days in ‘real school’.”