

2024



LATE:

CLOSING THE YEAR

2024



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome!

As winter's chill settles in, we find ourselves in long, dark nights. We hunker down with family and curl up with our favorite books. But we have finally reached the time where cultures around the world celebrate the return of the light. It is a season of hope and renewal where we are reminded that no matter how dark it gets, the light will always return.

As teachers, we find ourselves in darkness at various points in our careers. Whether it is a particularly hard day with students, destabilizing changes in our schools, or personal challenges that we struggle to set aside when we're in our classrooms, teaching can be hard.

Yet it is during those periods of hardship where we need each other the most. IATE has always been a little light of hope for me. Here, I've found a community of professionals who renew my enthusiasm, share ideas, encourage innovation, and foster my resolve. I consistently return from the Fall Conference renewed and ready to try something new. The reality of teaching is that our days often switch quickly from darkness to unexpected and profound joy when we bear witness to the potential of our students and the possibilities of the next generation.

During this season of celebration, let's remember that no darkness lasts forever, and that together, we can support and sustain one another knowing that the light will be back soon.

I wish you a wonderful holiday season and wish you a very joyful 2025!

Kim Kotty

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Thank you!

As I built this newsletter to close out 2024, a theme started to emerge: *growth through collaboration*.

We ELA teachers can't do it alone even though we might feel alone, huddled over our desks during the upcoming cold winter months, mug within reach, heavy eyes.

I was unable to attend the IATE Conference this year due to parent-teacher conferences. Still, I learned from the sessions as I collaborated with presenters, organizers, and attendees for this newsletter. *I grew*.

My intention with every newsletter is to bring you updates from IATE and to show opportunities for growth. Below, we have coverage of the Conference as well as spotlights on book choices, technology, and classroom tools. *We collaborate*.

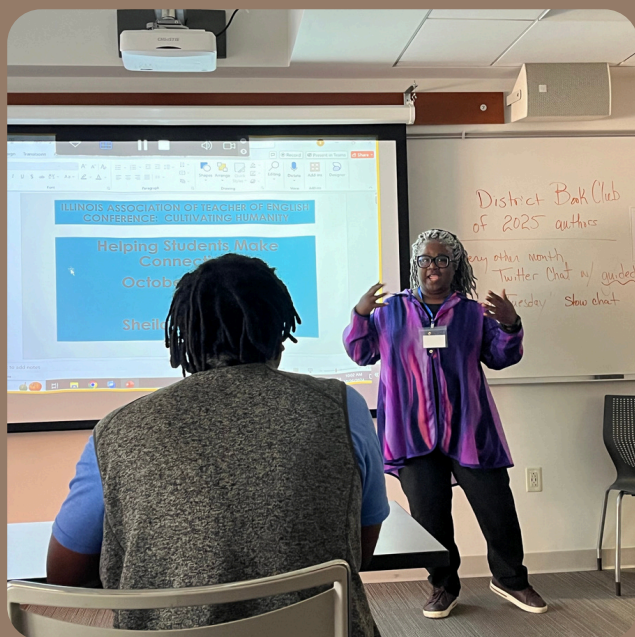
Finally, we also have an important republication regarding a national article that concerns our field. I'm particularly interested in starting a conversation about how the media portrays educators. Too often, educators are easy scapegoats, and we must address misconceptions like Carrie M. Santos-Thomas did (see below). Together, we can hold people accountable when they misrepresent the work that English teachers do.

Toward encouraging that collaboration, that learning, that growing, I encourage anyone to email me with a quick idea for upcoming newsletters. I look forward to connecting.

Lauralee Moss

PICTURES FROM IATE

Our annual conference took place in October. Enjoy the images of collaboration, learning, and fun.



LETTER FROM THE 2ND VP

2024 Conference Wrap-Up

Thank you to everyone who participated in IATE's 2024 Fall Conference, from session presenters, to featured speakers, to discussion panelists, and to everyone who attended! With nearly fifty session presenters and over 150 attendees, it was a smashing success! We had a significant number of new and pre-service teachers in attendance also. We welcome you to the profession!

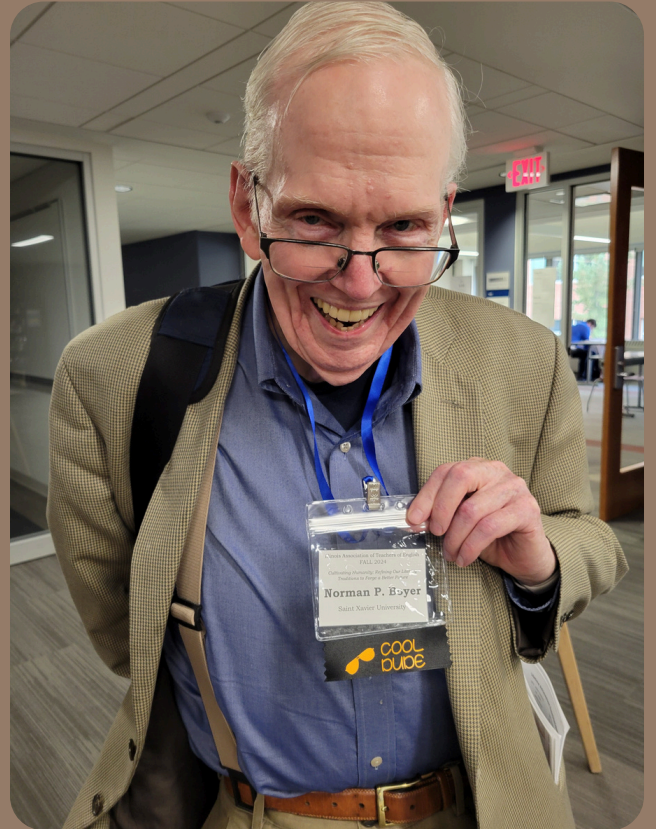
The two-day conference, held on 25 & 26 of October 2024, at Millikin University, gave English language arts educators an opportunity to hear from several featured speakers. Conference attendees had breakout and workshop sessions on a variety of topics to choose from. The topics address ranged across a spectrum of interests in different literary genres, writing and reading, and educational technology (including on the advent of AI). Attendees also had the opportunity to hear other teachers from across Illinois share their experiences with book challenges, co-teaching, and the spectrum of student engagement from student choice to scripted curriculums at several discussion panels.

Carol Jago opened the conference on Friday morning with her talk on "Challenged and Challenging Texts and Teaching." She shared her many years of wisdom, providing attendees with advice on how to face the challenges of teaching literacy to the next generation of students. Following her opening session, Carol led a breakout session titled "Strengthening Students' Reading Muscles to Build Stamina and Confidence." In her session she presented strategies for getting reluctant readers motivated to read.

continued below

PICTURES FROM IATE

Our annual conference took place in October. Enjoy the images of collaboration, learning, and fun.



LETTER FROM THE 2ND VP

continued

At lunch Jose Olivarez delivered his address, “Promises of Gold: Reflections on Writing, Reading, and the Classroom.” During his address, Jose Olivarez read a number of his poems and recounted the ways in which language arts impacted his life. You can read in more detail about Jose Olivarez’s address in Jennifer Gouin’s piece elsewhere in this newsletter. After lunch, Jen Vincent interviewed Jose Olivarez about his creative process and the insights that the creative process has given him into the human condition.

After a full day of breakout sessions, workshop sessions, discussion panels, and featured speakers, the day ended with dinner and the awards presentation. Recipients of the minority scholarship were announced, Kyron Elam and Syncere Williams. Shannon Radcliffe presented the Lifetime Achievement Award to Jennifer Gouin, an active member and past president of IATE. Delores Robinson recognized the winners of IATE’s Student Literature and Art Contest. Finally, Genevieve Sherman presented the IATE Author of the Year Award to Illinois author Joelle Charbonneau.

Saturday morning brought us another series of exciting and informative breakout sessions, workshops and discussion panels. It also brought us an exciting (and nerve-wracking) campus-wide internet outage. Thank you to our President Betsy Geiselman and the Millikin Technology Department for their quick action to address the problem and get us up and running. And apologies to session presenters who had to adjust to a major technical snafu.

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PICTURES FROM IATE

Our annual conference took place in October. Enjoy the images of collaboration, learning, and fun.



LETTER FROM THE 2ND VP

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We were all excited at the Past Presidents' Luncheon to be visited by Lolita Green, president of IATE from 1992-1993. Abdi Nazemian served as the featured speaker. Abdi Nazemian talked about how important story-telling is to making young people feel visible, especially for those from marginalized groups. He recounted his experiences as a young queer Iranian-American and the effect he felt not seeing people with similar experiences represented in the stories he read and heard.

Prior to the luncheon, Andrew Rodbro interviewed Abdi Nazemian. They talked about Abdi's experience as a screen-writer and its differences from novel writing. They also talked about Abdi's novels, namely *Like a Love Story*, *Desert Echoes*, and *The Chandler Legacies*.

To close the luncheon, IATE's newly-elected second vice-president and conference committee chair, Delores Robinson, announced the theme for the 2025 conference: *Nurturing Novel Connections*, set for 24 & 25 of October 2025, at Moraine Valley Community College. Session proposals will be accepted soon. Keep an eye on your email and check back to the IATE website (iateonline.org) for updates.

The fall conference provided attendees with valuable knowledge to take back to their classrooms and prepare them for the developments in English language arts pedagogy for the coming years. It's an event that never fails to refresh one's love of teaching. If you are interested in making your mark on the English teaching profession through leadership in IATE, please contact IATE's executive secretary, Kaitlin Glause, at kglause@millikin.edu.

Andrew J. Rodbro

WHAT DOES IATE DO?

Thanks for being a member of IATE. Among all the business of life and teaching, we might forget the importance of belonging to a professional organization.



Abby Eaton, Allison Nagaraja, Yasmine Mohammad.

At our yearly conference, you can connect with English teachers across the state, gain ideas, collaborate, and present. Pre-service teachers are welcome as well.

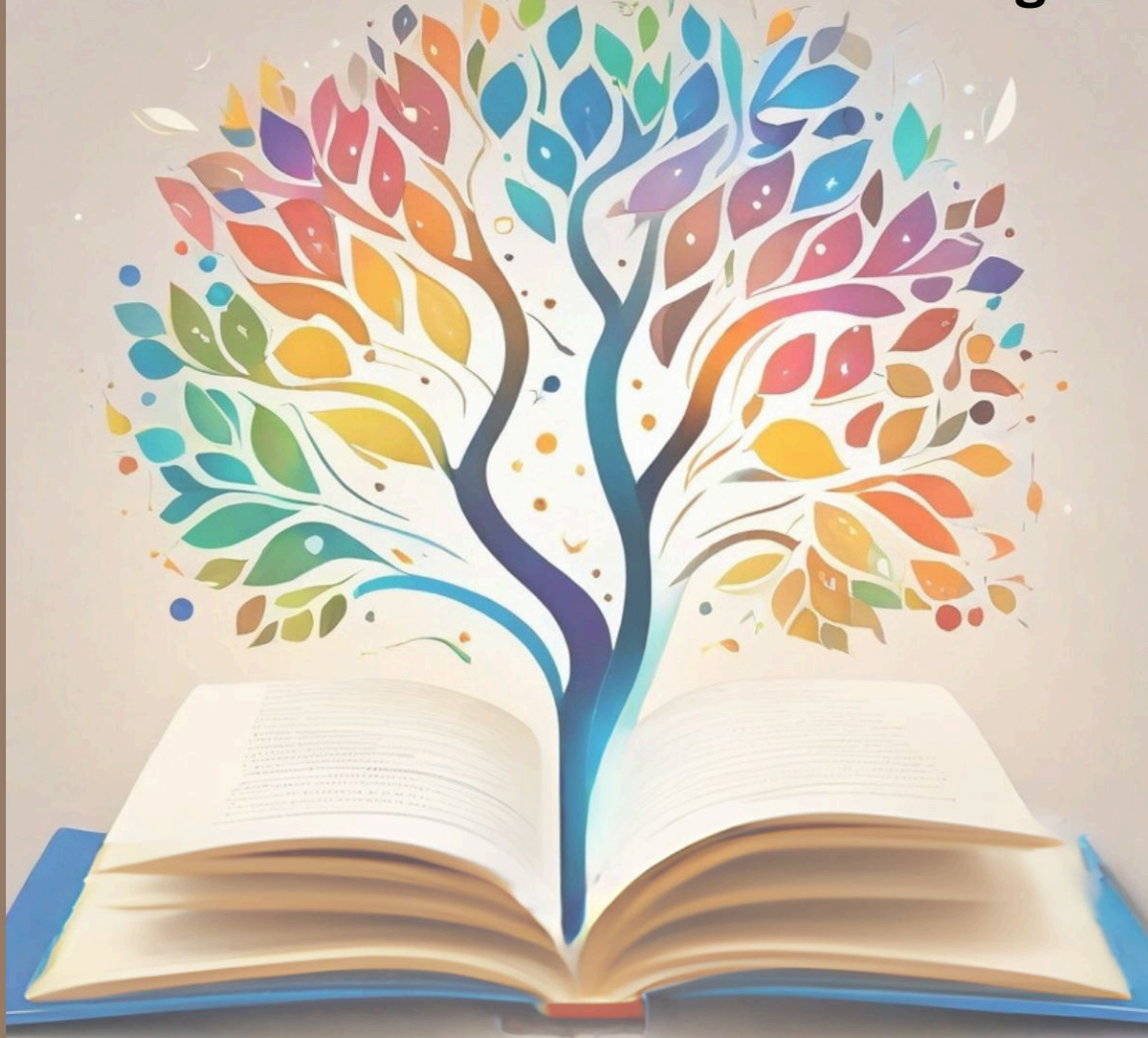


Finley Callahan, Jacklyn Costa, Naya Haller, Maria Parada, and Zoe Rehders-Blasco, students of Dr. Betsy Kahn and Dr. E. Mariah Spencer.

JOIN US NEXT YEAR!

Plan ahead for the 2025 conference.

Illinois Association of Teachers of English



IATE Fall Conference
Nurturing Novel Connections



Moraine Valley
Community College
October 24-25, 2025

JOSÉ OLIVAREZ

Review of our keynote speaker, famous author José Olivarez.

JEN GOUIN

For Friday's lunchtime presentation, attendees were treated to poet and educator José Olivarez sharing his personal story and poetry. His opening remarks included his deep appreciation of teachers, especially his Calumet City, Illinois TF North High School District #215 English teachers, stating that they "are the reason that any of this has been possible" for him. Olivarez extended his accolades to the audience for their important work in classrooms today.

His love of WWE wrestling is second only to his love of story, specifically poetry. He read three poems to us from his first book *Citizen Illegal*: "Mexican-American Disambiguation," "River Oaks Mall," and "Getting Ready to Say I Love You to My Dad, It Rains." Each poem is a complex, moving, and sometimes humorous exploration of life as a Mexican American. He interspersed his readings with a discussion of his life to this point. As a child, he entered kindergarten without ELL assistance despite speaking only Spanish, and he worked very hard in his reading class, as he was his family's chief translator. He often felt he was trying to hide who he was and didn't want to be "found out as an impostor."

JOSÉ OLIVAREZ

Review of our keynote speaker, famous author José Olivarez.

JEN GOUIN

continued

The next three poems he read came from his 2nd book *Promises of Gold*, which was longlisted for the 2023 National Book Award: “Tradition,” “Wealth,” and “Upward Mobility.” Olivarez discussed how his introduction to the poetry slam team at TF North High School led to a change in his relationship with English. They had an assembly, and it was the first time he saw students “front and center” and the adults were quiet. This student-run activity made him realize that “[students] can participate in literature not just as readers but as writers.” Olivarez explained that this realization changed him and his relationship to the world. As a freshman, he had spent most of his time angry and upset, as he felt this was how he was supposed to be. However, this newfound experience with poetry gave him insight into different opportunities and outcomes. It gave him the space and ability to “slow down and consider what is possible.” He emphasized that poetry truly is the “anti-social media” with its ability to make us pause and immerse ourselves in reading.

JOSÉ OLIVAREZ

Review of our keynote speaker, famous author José Olivarez.

JEN GOUIN

continued

His next selections were “Poem to Take the Belt Out of My Dad’s Hand” and “Ode to Tortillas.” In his next vignette, he talked about how we read through the lens of identity, which, for him, includes immigration. As a fellow educator, he asked us to reconsider the classic creative writing model of group peer critiques. He urged writers to “talk [themselves] into where revelation can happen” as we slow down and imagine possibilities. Olivarez ended his presentation with two final poems: “Happening Sonnet,” which he wrote with students based on “The Days Is Numbered;” and “The Sky is Dope,” written by his brother Pedro. José Olivarez’s presentation was an invigorating transition to a full afternoon of engaging sessions and workshopping opportunities.



PICTURES FROM IATE

Check out some of our fabulous speakers, and plan to join us next year.



Abdi Nazemian with past IATE President Lolita Green.



Abdi Nazemian with Andrew Rodbro.



Active IATE member and past IATE president, Carrie Santo-Thomas is also a member of NCTE's Build Your Stack committee. She gave a presentation at the Build Your Stack event called "What the Heart Wants: Books That Don't Get Returned." Carrie talked about the books that she regularly lends from her classroom library that students derive so much value and joy from that they keep.



Two presenters at IATE's 2024 Fall Conference reprised their conference presentation at the Build Your Stack event, "Inspiring Hope with Queer Representation." Julie Hoffman and Cindi Koudelka presented selections that they recommend for all levels, from elementary through adult readers, that represent the queer community.

NEED BOOKS?

Join the nationwide teacher wish list program!

719 LaSalle St.
Ottawa, IL 61350
815-433-7323



INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLER

Prairie Fox Books

Join the Nationwide Teacher Wish List Program

Prairie Fox Books accepts teacher wish lists from ANYWHERE in the country and posts the lists on their [website](#). Patrons can purchase a book or gift card from the list to have sent to the teacher for use at Prairie Fox Books!

Patrons can also "Sponsor a School Library/Classroom" through Prairie Fox Books!

Teachers enjoy 15% off all their purchases year-round!

Email Dylan for more information:

prairiefoxbooks@gmail.com

“Making Sure Teachers Remain a Priority ”

Generous partner of IATE's Randy Rambo Classroom Library Grant

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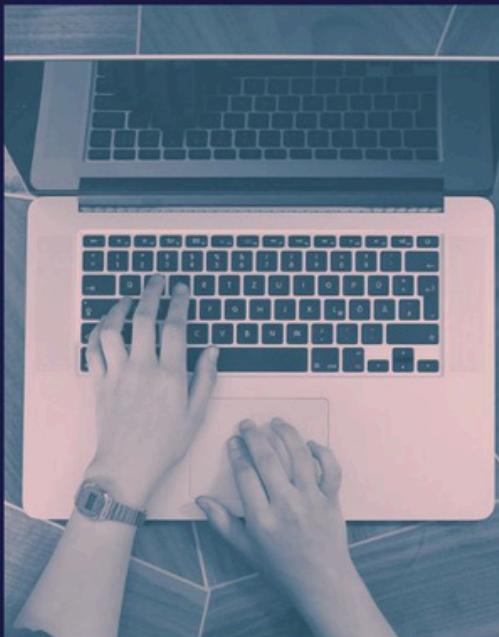
SHARE THE POWER!

Could you give your students authentic audiences? They can be published authors!

NEW DEADLINE!

LATE STUDENT WRITING, ART, & PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

15 DECEMBER 2024



Read details [here](#).

SHARE THE POWER!

Could you give your students authentic audiences? They can be published authors!



2025 ISPS STUDENT CONTESTS

ILLINOIS STATE POETRY SOCIETY December 1, 2024 – February 28, 2025

AWARDS in EACH CONTEST

Top Three plus Two Honorable-Mention poems will be published in the 2025 *Fresh Ink* anthology. Winning poets receive a copy of the book (also available on amazon.com), a certificate, and a one-year ISPS membership.

Top Three Winners also receive cash prizes, and their poems advance to the National Manningham Trust Student Poetry Contest. For details, visit the NFSPS website: nfsps.net/manningham-student-poetry-contest

SENIOR DIVISION CONTESTS Grades 9-12

1. ISPS President's Challenge Award

Sponsored by Mary Beth Bretzlaug

- SUBJECT: Dreams
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 30 lines, includes spaces between stanzas
- PRIZES: \$40/\$30/\$20

2. Sejong Poetry Award

Sponsored by the Sejong Cultural Society

- SUBJECT: Any FORM: SIJO, Korea's Poetry form, <https://bit.ly/3qN30IZ>
- LINE LIMIT: 3 lines, total 45 syllables
- PRIZES: \$40/\$30/\$20

3. Ida Kotyuk Award

Sponsored by Ida Kotyuk

- SUBJECT: Monday Morning
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 40
- PRIZES: \$40/\$30/\$20

4. Music Poetry Award

Sponsored by Jill Spealman

- SUBJECT: Music
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 30
- PRIZES: \$40/\$30/\$20

5. Poems That Sing Award

Sponsored by Colleen McManus Hein

- SUBJECT: Poems that could be song lyrics
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 40 lines
- PRIZES: \$40/\$30/\$20

6. Huitain Award

Sponsored by Highland Park Poetry

- SUBJECT: Any
- FORM: Huitain: 8-line stanza; ababbcb rhyme scheme; usually 8 to 10 syllables per line. LINE LIMIT: 8
- PRIZES: \$35/\$25/\$15

7. Lederer Award

Sponsored by Bill Lederer

- SUBJECT: Confinement
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 40
- PRIZES: \$35/\$25/\$15

JUNIOR DIVISION CONTESTS Grades 6-8

8. ISPS President's Challenge Award

Sponsored by Mary Beth Bretzlaug

- SUBJECT: Dreams
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 30 lines, includes spaces between stanzas
- PRIZES: \$30/\$20/\$10

9. Sejong Poetry Award

Sponsored by the Sejong Cultural Society

- SUBJECT: Any FORM: SIJO, Korea's Poetry form, <https://bit.ly/3qN30IZ>
- LINE LIMIT: 3 lines, total 45 syllables
- PRIZES: \$30/\$20/\$10

10. Ida Kotyuk Award

Sponsored by Ida Kotyuk

- SUBJECT: Monday Morning
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 40
- PRIZES: \$30/\$20/\$10

11. Lederer Award

Sponsored by Bill Lederer

- SUBJECT: Confinement
- FORM: Any LINE LIMIT: 40
- PRIZES: \$15/\$10/\$5

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Any submission that does not follow ALL guidelines will be disqualified.

1. Eligibility. Original work of a single student in a public or private Illinois school or home-schooled in Illinois.

2. Entries. Only one poem per category. No poem can be submitted to multiple categories.

3. Unpublished. Poems published in print or online or accepted for publication (except in school publications) are ineligible.

4. Simultaneous Submissions. Poems currently entered in other contests are not eligible.

POEM & PAGE FORMATS

- **English** only.
- **Lines.** All text and blank lines count except the title and one blank line after title.
- **Line width.** Maximum: 50 characters,

includes punctuation marks and spaces.

- **Single-spaced lines.**
- **One poem** per 8.5" x 11" page.
- **Typed** or computer-generated, 12 point, plain font (Times New Roman, etc.) on white paper. No artwork.
- **Title** all poems except haiku.

PREPARING SUBMISSIONS

1. Submit two typed copies of each poem (one anonymous for the judge; one with ID). Include contest number and title on the upper left of both.

2. ID Copy Only: On the upper right include:

- Student's name, age, grade level.
- School/home-school name and address (city/state/zip required).
- Teacher/Sponsor's name (first and last name and Mr./Ms./Mrs.).
- Teacher/Sponsor's email address.
- Add on the page a statement signed by the student: "I certify that this poem is my original work and has not been copied in whole or part from any author's poem in print or posted on the Internet."

Signed _____

3. Copies. Do not separate the copies. Do not staple the copies together.

4. Batched Mailings: Teachers/Sponsors may send all students' poems in one envelope.

- Sort poems by contest number.
- Keep anonymous and ID copies together (no staples or paper clips).
- Include your email address.

5. Self-entered. An individual student may submit entries in a single mailing.

6. Fees. There are no entry fees.

DEADLINE: Postmark must be between: **December 1, 2024–February 28, 2025**

SEND TO:

ISPS c/o Mary Beth Bretzlaug
426 Park Avenue
Highland Park, IL 60035

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mary Beth Bretzlaug
ISPS.manningham@gmail.com
website: www.illinoispoets.org

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

What tools are helping you?

ALYSSA STALEY, MIDDLE SCHOOL ELA TEACHER

GIMKIT

In my opinion, Gimkit surpasses Kahoot!. My students transitioned from merely memorizing colors and shapes associated with Kahoot! answers to genuinely learning definitions, developing literacy skills, and adopting effective study habits. Gamification is an effective approach to engaging students who are accustomed to the fast-paced environment of TikTok. By playing games like Humans Vs. Zombies, The Floor is Lava, or Among Us, students earn energy and abilities by answering questions correctly.

With Gimkit Pro, teachers can assign Gimkits as individual homework. Both the Free and Pro versions offer Live Mode, allowing teachers to access reports and data for individual students or entire classes. This data includes the most frequently missed questions, individual student accuracy, as well as details on questions attempted, answered correctly, and answered incorrectly. I particularly enjoy using Gimkit for vocabulary review throughout a unit and as a study guide activity where students can refer to their handwritten notes to assist in answering questions.

Gimkit Free Version: Available at no cost.

Gimkit Pro: Costs \$99 per year for one user.

Gimkit for Departments: Priced at \$650.

Gimkit for Schools: Available for \$1,000.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

What tools are helping you?

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GIMKIT, CONT.

Before I introduced Gimkit, my assessments were varied and spread out, but now I observe higher assessment scores because my students are engaged with the material, making it feel more like a computer game. Features of the game include randomizing team numbers or allowing teachers to choose teams manually. Additionally, there is a nickname generator that prevents students from creating inappropriate names. If students fail to comply with the instruction to use their real names for points, they can be removed from the game and must re-enter with the correct name. A late join option is also available for students who may have difficulty logging in.

If I choose to include Gimkit in my official grading system, I typically assign it a value of 20 points and utilize students' accuracy rates to calculate their scores. When my agenda board indicates Gimkit, my students are excited, alert, and eager to participate. However, I recommend not using this tool every week or daily, as part of the excitement comes from its occasional use. This approach ensures high levels of engagement and promotes active learning, resulting in no sleepy kids in the room.

COMPLETE PICTURE

THE ATLANTIC DID ME DIRTY

Many of us have read “The Elite College Students Who Can’t Read Books” in *The Atlantic*. Here, the “English teacher from Illinois” from the article responds. IATE is proud to republish this important response.

Early this summer I was interviewed by Rose Horowitz, an editor for The Atlantic. She told me that she had heard from a university professor that incoming students were struggling to keep up with the reading load. She explained that she was working on an article that would explore the problem of reading stamina and asked me to share my experiences in the high school classroom. I was not surprised by Horowitz’s hypothesis. She attributes undergrads’ lack of reading stamina to lowered expectations in high school literature curricula, specifically arguing that limiting full-length novels and replacing long-form content with excerpts and summaries has weakened readers’ constitutions. She, in turn, ascribes these instructional choices to the oppressive presence of standardized testing and the Common Core. And cell phones, always cell phones.

It is a perfectly reasonable assumption, but it's wrong. This is not to say that there aren't external factors affecting students' reading stamina, but to line up such a simple series of dominoes to topple oversimplifies a complex challenge and places undue blame on the shoulders of discerning young readers and the public school teachers who work tirelessly to support them.

My primary concern throughout the summer of interviews, emails, and fact-checking, was that we were slipping into a familiar panic in the face of progress: how will this next technological or social development bring about the downfall of society? It's an old story; in the fall of 1978, *The MATCY Journal* published a handful of "probable" quotes from history including the infamous lament over the proliferation of paper: "Students today depend on paper too much. They don't know how to write on a slate without getting chalk dust all over themselves. They can't clean a slate properly. What will they do when they run out of paper?" This, and the other quotes in the article, aren't actually real. However, they reveal a genuine pattern in panicked thinking that, rather than unveiling flaws in social and technological change, instead lays bare the atrophied mindset of the people doing the panicking.

From a similarly stodgy perspective, Horowitch's article reflects a frighteningly narrow definition of what constitutes worthwhile literature. Passing references to *Moby Dick*, *Crime and Punishment*, and even my unit about *The Odyssey*, confine literary merit to a very small, very old, very white, and very male box. As a staunch advocate for diverse and representative literature, I was immediately curious about the actual texts at the center of this "crisis" so I asked Horowitch directly what types of books were the sticking points in her professor friends' curricula. Unsurprisingly, it was canonical classics. As Horowitch points out, I am just "one public-high school teacher in Illinois," but while professors at elite universities sound the alarm over Gen Z undergrads not finishing *Les Miserables* because they are uninterested in reading a pompous French man drone on for chapters about the Paris sewer system, my colleagues and I have developed professional toolboxes with endless other ways to inspire our students to read about justice, compassion, and redemption.

And that's a good thing, since Gen Z and Gen Alpha don't bow to authority for authority's sake. They simply won't do things they don't want to do, and I actually kinda love that. The rising young generations want texts that matter to them, that reflect their lives and experiences.

So when we force-feed yet another vanilla canonical dust collector, and then complain that they aren't playing along, it's just not a good look for us.

Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, Ibi Zoboi's *American Street*, and David Bowles's *The Prince and the Coyote*, are all complex, challenging, and substantial texts that speak to the interests and experiences of my students, so it's not a fight to get them reading. Frustratingly, despite the numerous examples I provided of students reading books cover-to-cover in my class, Horowitz opted to include only the unit that, like the original rhapsodes of the bronze age, I excerpt and abridge. Equally frustrating is that her article implies that I was forced into that decision in order to pacify floundering students or submit to the demands of standardized testing.

Rather, my experience is that young readers are eminently capable of critically engaging in long form content, but they're rightfully demanding a seat at the table where decisions about texts are being made. Luckily, we are living through a literary renaissance. Publishers are flourishing amid a profusion of stories, books that give voice to the experiences of people who look and live like the young readers in my classroom. There is no shortage of engaging texts that students can and will read cover-to-cover. But if we insist that quality literature must come from old dead white men, we are consigning ourselves to irrelevance before we even begin.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

How does the media portray educators in harmful and incomplete ways, and how does the media portray us in positive ways?

Jot down a sentence or two, and email lauraleemoss@gmail.com with your response.

One often overlooked hurdle that I brought up with Horowitch was the impact of language evolution on reading comprehension and comfort. Linguistically, the dialect of English spoken by contemporary adolescents is rapidly moving further away from the vernacular of the canonical works we ask them to read. While this has always been true to some degree, social media and technology have sped up language evolution and widened the gap between English dialects. My students code switch into my spoken dialect to engage with me -something that I never had to do to communicate with my teachers in high school. So when I ask them to shift further into the recesses of linguistic history to read Shakespeare, the struggle is real. The additional layer of linguistic distance between them and Shakespeare remind me of my own struggles through Chaucer in the original Middle English -difficult and worthwhile, but truly a challenge. As a society, we have become more accepting of vernacular differences and demand less code switching -all good and important changes that validate students' identities. But it does inevitably become harder to successfully navigate long form texts in dialects of English that are fading ever further into history. My observations about the way my students navigate written language come from experience and observation, something I emphasized with Horowitch as I urged her to talk to a linguist or linguistic anthropologist to get their perspective on possible language-related obstacles affecting students' reading. Regardless, as a responsible educator, decisions about text selection are not haphazard or routine. I am careful to select texts that offer diverse content and language. Simply put, I require more justification than merely longstanding tradition as I set a course for my precious minutes in the classroom.

One of the reasons I have found so much success with *The Odyssey*, aside from the monsters and murder, is that the emerging generation of translators, including Dr. Emily Wilson and Maria Dahvana Headley have been transparent about their processes of bringing new life to canonical treasures like *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf*. In one lecture, Wilson explains that historically, translators would often intentionally foreignize their language to establish gravity and reverence for these works as products of “alien cultures,” a tradition the new generation of translators are choosing to break from because of the exclusionary effect it has on readers. Contemporary translators have shifted their mindset from one of preserving tradition, to one of illuminating narrative and purpose. Homer wanted his audiences to be both entertained and shepherded into the culture. Wilson seems to want that too, and so she gives us a deeply relatable, heartbreakingly honest, and eminently readable translation of *The Odyssey*. In allowing her understanding of the story to expand with time, she remains true to the story’s original purpose and relevant to a new generation of readers.

These are all points I made in speaking to and emailing with Horowitch and her fact checkers throughout the summer. I have to think, I was not the source she was hoping for. I was a problem. Perhaps the most disappointing defeat I observed in the final article was that although I shared my observations of the tireless work of colleagues at the state and national level advocating for intellectual freedom, Horowitch does not acknowledge that culturally, we do not value reading. We ban books, scrutinize classroom libraries, demonize librarians, and demoralize teachers. We pay lip service to the importance of literacy, requiring four years of English and regularly testing literacy skills, but when push comes to shove, we don't make space for the curiosity and joy that are the foundations of lifelong literacy habits. In truth, we seem to be doggedly fighting against the best interest of a literate populace. While aggressive censorship is an agony I've been spared in my current position, it is a formidable obstacle I see my colleagues and heroes across the state and across the country struggling with.

Instead, Horowitch places heavy blame on standardized testing and the Common Core. I argue that this blame is misplaced and irrelevant. While there is absolutely a push for analytical skills to be developed (see AP curriculum and testing), truth be told, Common Core or College Readiness, they're more similar than different. The pressure to switch from one set of standards to another isn't much more than a nuisance in the grand scheme of teaching. In practice, teachers have always balanced various standards and testing with a familiar degree of disruption to the important work of building practical literacy skills. The never-ending cycle of new initiatives and projects outlasted by tough-as-nails veteran teachers is the oldest trope in the faculty lounge and certainly not newsworthy enough to merit The Atlantic's hefty subscription fee.

In a move as cliché as blaming standardized testing, Horowitch takes aim at smartphones and social media, a constant classroom annoyance to be sure, but old news, at least among high school educators, who have already read *The Anxious Generation*, adapted our routines, and moved on. It seems too easy of a target to take seriously in the context of a major American journal like The Atlantic, but here we are. It should go without saying that there is a medium between TikTok and Tolstoy. If we position ourselves as fighting against social media and short-form entertainment, we've already lost. The dopamine hit from the ding of a push notification is far more neurologically satiating than anything I have to offer in a classroom. So even as I continue to develop more engaging curricula, I ask my students and their caregivers to reframe their expectations, to reconsider the type of "entertainment" that they expect from my class. When my students shift their mindset to enter my classroom expecting nerdery, thought-provoking conversation, and midwest dad jokes, they find that the forty-five minutes passes enjoyably. I trust the literature because I am confident in my skill as an educator.

Creating space for the joy and curiosity of reading is important work that high school teachers step up to every day, designing lessons to teach what once came naturally. Previous generations turned to reading as a leisure activity, so they had an innate sense for how to read in school and how to read sneakily under the covers way past bedtime. To some degree, all of the things I've mentioned in this essay have stripped reading of its human value and made it into a chore. Teachers are thus charged with retraining kids to love books. It's hard, but it's working. Again, the current proliferation of complex and substantial young adult texts is a goldmine -if we don't cut off access. But we have to be intentional about teaching young people how to read for fun versus how to read for academic purposes, and it's not something that all professors have been trained to do. At the secondary level, we differentiate between the short works that must be read closely and copiously annotated versus the more substantial works that must be comprehended and revisited, pondered and discussed in a social-academic collaboration. Are the panicked professors expecting -or implying- that their students should be giving everything the close-reading treatment? Are the professors clearly communicating appropriate expectations? In my sophomore honors class, I invest time in teaching my students how to build their understanding over several readings of a scene, chapter, or poem at various degrees of scrutiny and analysis, and that is an investment I consistently see returns on.

The golden rule of maintaining a presence on social media is to stay clear of the comment section, but realistically, its siren song is impossible to resist. In this case, I truly wish I had tied myself to the mast. The Atlantic's promotional tweet for this article quickly ignited a barrage of ill-informed comments about the "dumbing down of the American education system" and gratitude for yet another reason to homeschool or unschool or outschool. It's a familiar cadence for those of us who have devoted our professional lives to education, and still try to maintain an online existence. While this essay is evidence enough of my frustration, I'm first and foremost an educator. I accept The Atlantic's journalistic tantrum with a grain of salt, understanding that its articles are unbearably long and perhaps this topic cut the author a little close to the bone. I can extend my compassion and pity, but then I have to get back to work -we're starting The Odyssey tomorrow and I have some eyeball puns to sharpen before we hit chapter nine.

EDITOR'S NOTE: THANK YOU TO CARRIE M. SANTOS-THOMAS FOR GRACIOUSLY ALLOWING REPRODUCTION IN THIS NEWSLETTER.

YOU CAN FOLLOW HER ON [SUBSTACK](#).

CELEBRATIONS

Scholarship Winner **Kyron Elam**



This year, one winner of the IATE Minority Scholarship is Kyron Elam. Kyron earned his M.A. in Secondary Education at DePaul University this past fall after he completed student teaching at Homewood Flossmoor High School in Flossmoor, IL. He has been teaching at Crete-Monee High School in Crete, IL this winter and spring where he will continue teaching next year.

Kyron was nominated by Kim Kotty who had the pleasure of teaching Kyron during his M.A. She described him as "having an innate curiosity and earnest desire to learn. Kyron has a deep respect for his students– their education, their time, and their needs. He wants his students to enjoy their learning and have school be a meaningful part of life. Kyron truly believes in the power of education to build a better world, and he is eager to creatively problem-solve any teaching challenge to help students develop the literacy and critical thinking skills to do just that."

Kyron will receive \$500 to be used on anything needed to prepare for the first year in the classroom. IATE congratulates Kyron and sends wishes for a great first year at Crete-Monee High School!

CELEBRATIONS

Thanks to IATE
member
Linnea Nordstrom
for the images!



The Junior High students at Rossville-Alvin Grade School were ecstatic to receive a special package from Prairie Fox Books in Ottawa, Illinois, filled with their most-wanted titles to add to their classroom library.

The books were thanks to the Randy Rambo Classroom Library Grant gifted at the IATE Fall 2024 Conference. Mr. John Barrett at Pleasant Plains Middle School was the original winner drawn at the conference.

However, as an inspiring act of kindness, he passed the grant on to a teacher newer to the profession, Miss Linnea Nordstrom at Rossville-Alvin Grade School. Her students got to fill out a form with specific books and topics they wanted to see in the classroom library, and she selected several of their choices, along with recommendations shared by other educators at the IATE conference, to fill her classroom shelves.

CELEBRATIONS



Most of the books flew right off the shelves, and the kids were overwhelmed with gratitude and excitement seeing them added.

This grant was a wonderful way to help ignite a passion for reading in the lives of reluctant readers and inspire avid readers to read even more with the introduction of some brand-new titles.

Many of these stories encompass the theme of the 2024 conference, Cultivating Humanity, and we hope that students will either see themselves reflected in these stories or learn about cultures and experiences different from their own while they develop a love for reading.

Here's to the next generation of readers!



STICKY NOTES?

Why do students love sticky notes? Is it the sticky? Is it the little piece of paper?

To those questions I say, “Who cares?” Let’s use them.

Here are some easy ways to add student engagement with sticky notes.

Scaffold.

Students write their favorite part of the reading assignment. Rearrange the notes as you build connections between the pieces students have provided.

LITERATURE

One sentence.

Have students write one sentence that they dislike & post the note. Then, have each student take a note & rewrite the sentence for inspiration.

WRITING

Draw the word.

Write vocabulary words on the board. Give each student 2-3 sticky notes to create images/ representations of words & adhere the notes under the words. Review & discuss as a class.

VOCABULARY

Pair them up!

Students write their speaking strength & display it. Students then find someone whose strength is their weakness, and they practice together.

SPEAKING

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish by Pablo Cartaya

ALYSSA STALEY, MIDDLE SCHOOL ELA TEACHER

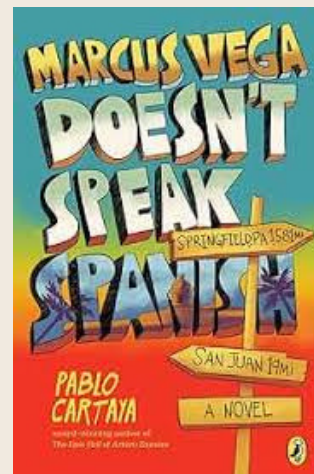
Meet Marcus Vega, a kid so big that rumors swirl around him being an undercover vice principal! As the eldest son of a single mom, Marcus feels the weight of responsibility on his shoulders. When a sleazy repairman offers to fix something for free in exchange for a date with his mom, Marcus hatches a clever plan to make some cash by enforcing the school's rules.

From holding onto students' cell phones to charging a small fee for littering, Marcus takes his role seriously. With a younger sibling who has Down Syndrome, he also uses his imposing size to protect others, escorting classmates to and from school to keep them safe from the bullying of Stephen—who doesn't like Marcus at all. Things take a turn when Stephen crosses the line, hurling a hurtful slur at Marcus' brother, leading to Marcus's suspension just before spring break.

When Marcus's mom suggests a trip, he desperately wants to go to Puerto Rico, hoping to connect with his estranged father. But will this connection be the key to his identity, or is there something deeper he needs to discover?

Join Marcus in this heartfelt, realistic fiction novel that explores the themes of family, compassion, identity, and community connection, perfect for students in grades 5 through 9!

Recommended as a classroom library book, First Chapter Fridays, or to diversify your students' reading.



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

Wintergirls by Laurie Halse Anderson
We Regret to Inform You by Ariel Kaplan

LAURALEE MOSS, HIGH SCHOOL ELA TEACHER

Do you need some winter books? These young adult books are worth your time.

Wintergirls by (THE one and only) Laurie Halse Anderson handles the topic of disordered eating with care. The protagonist eventually gets help, but you might handle this book with a warning in your classroom.

We Regret to Inform You by Ariel Kaplan is a mystery surrounding a top student who fails to get into college—her transcripts have been tampered with. But why?

Both books contain wintery images, making them perfect for curling up during these cold months.



NEW DISTRICT LEADER

AngelaNina Escanilla, District 3, Western Suburban

AngelaNina graduated from Illinois State University with a Bachelor's Degree in English Education and a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Concordia University Chicago. She has been teaching for 9 years, with her first 3 years as a 7th grade Reading and Language Arts teacher and is currently teaching 8th grade Humanities. She teaches at Unity Junior High School in Cicero, which also happens to be her former middle school. It was a full circle moment to return to the same town that has taught her so much about adversity and advocacy. It was also the place where she first started "teaching" as a volunteer reading and math tutor at the Cicero Public Library at the age of 14.

Angela is also an avid runner, having run over 20+ races including marathons, half-marathons, 10ks, and 5ks. During her free time, she enjoys painting, gardening, and reading dystopian novels.



IN MEMORIAM

Former IATE member Dr. Richard Pommier, or Dr. P.

Richard Pommier taught for 47 years in public education, most of which were at Anna-Jonesboro High School. Originally hired as a Latin and Calculus teacher, he eventually became a long-time chair of the English department.

He spent many years involved in the school play/musical, was actively involved in the Education Association, and also coached scholar bowl.

Along with his commitment to excellence as an English teacher and his love for his students, he shared a passion for the Illinois Association of Teachers of English, and served on the Council for many years as its Secretary.





WHAT'S NEXT?

IATE cannot exist without support from our members. Thank you for being a member!

Have an idea?

No idea is too small! If you have read a book, created an activity, or have a suggestion, please share it with IATE. Send an email to lauraleemoss@gmail.com for publication.