

A newsletter of the Montana Association of Teachers of English Language Arts
www.matelamt.com

MFPE (FORMERLY MEA-MFT) CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

Picture-book Biographer Bryant to Speak at Conference

By Joyce Herbeck

Louis Braille, Peter Mark Roget, Horace Pippin, William Carlos Williams, and Georgia O'Keeffe have a biographer in common; she is one of MATELA's keynote speakers for the MFPE Educators' Conference.



Jen Bryant has immortalized these subjects and more in her award-winning nonfiction picture books. She will present "Unbelievable...but True! Creating Nonfiction & Historical Fiction Through Research and Storytelling" Oct. 19 at 11 a.m. in the Skyview Theater.

Besides being an accomplished nonfiction author, Bryant is also a poet. Her work has appeared in collections for adults and children.

Accolades abound for Bryant. *School Library Journal's* starred review praises *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille*: "The focus on Braille as one of the world's great inventors is apt; and by taking a close look at his childhood, his family, and his experiences as a young person, Bryant makes Braille's story even more powerful."

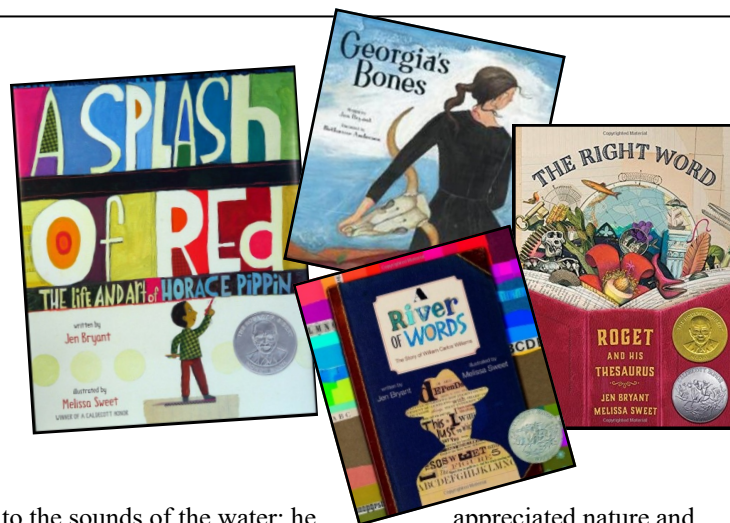
Booklist raves about *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus*: "In brilliant pages teeming with enthusiasm for language and learning, Bryant and [illustrator Melissa] Sweet joyfully celebrate curiosity, the love of knowledge, and the power of words."

A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin won the Orbis Pictus Award for excellence in nonfiction for children. *School Library Journal's* starred review states, "Bryant's meticulously researched, eloquent text makes this a winning read-aloud."

A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams is a Caldecott Honor Book. *School Library Journal's* starred review emphasizes the beauty of the language: "Bryant's poetic writing—'Gurgle, gurgle—swish, swish, swoosh.... The water went slipping and sliding over the smooth rocks, then poured in a torrent over the falls, then quieted again below'—describes beautifully how, as a child, Williams would lie peacefully by the Passaic River, listening



Bryant



to the sounds of the water; he the ordinary experiences of life."

appreciated nature and

Georgia's Bones was recognized in 2006 as a Children's Book Council Notable Social Studies Trade Book. Booklist's review recognizes the uniqueness of this stunning biography: "This bold, beautiful rendition has a certain nonconformist flair that surely
Pre-Conference Wednesday Evening Event: Validations, Vexations, and Victories

Launch your conference journey with a time designed for you, the reflective and responsive teacher. At the Rib and Chop House in Billings, MATELA members will be joining together for company and conversation Oct. 17 at 6 p.m.

Attendees can choose to purchase food and drinks from the menu or just join for a time of collegiality and perhaps comedy.

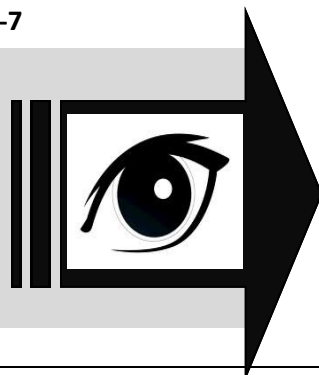
Teachers are encouraged to bring their writing to share and their strategies of care. In this casual session, participants will build competence and collegiality through sharing victories and vexations in an open mike format.

Participants will earn one renewal credit. Feel free to contact Dana Haring (dkharing@gmail.com) if you have questions!

See More on the Conference, PP 5-7

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Montana Book Festival Slated for Late September in Missoula

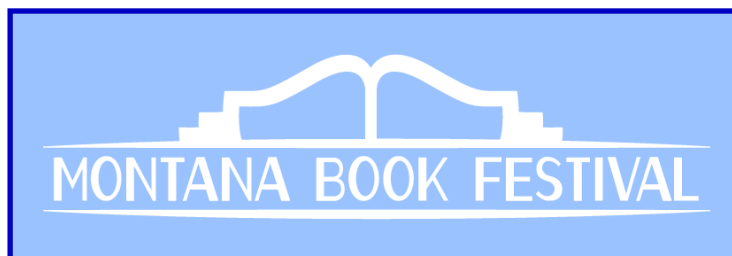
By Donna L. Miller

Striving to foster interest in literature for people of all ages, to perpetuate a sense of literary community, and to provide a vibrant, compelling forum for the literary arts that celebrate diversity, the Montana Book Festival (formerly Montana Festival of the Book) will take place at the Florence Hotel in Missoula, Sept. 27-30. Most events are free and open to the public.

Festival Co-Directors Tess Fahlgren and Sam Burris who claim that as “summer comes to a close, the Montana Book Festival comes to life,” invite book lovers to come celebrate with them.

The Festival exhibitor fair will be held in the Florence Hotel lobby, located at 111 North Higgins Ave, on Sept. 29 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Other events will include author readings, workshops, panel discussions, live performances, and exhibits.

As the humanities and nonprofit communities come together for learning and reflecting, Humanities Montana will participate in the festival. Kim Anderson, Director of Programs and Grants at Humanities Montana, will host special events at the Downtown Dance Collective (121 West Main Street, Missoula), including a celebration of Montana Center for the Book Prize winners and a



Big Sky Reads panel discussion.

This event began as a Humanities Montana project, paying tribute to the tradition of writing in the West by bringing together authors from across the region. But in 2015, with funding changes and a possible loss of the festival, a dedicated group of book lovers collaborated to ensure the festival's future.

Because of the generosity of fiscal sponsor, Arts Missoula, what was the Humanities Montana Festival of the Book became the Montana Book Festival. Since then, the Montana Book Festival has worked to build upon the event's legacy, as well as to reinvigorate the festival with new ideas and fresh perspective.

Those wanting to purchase a “Make America Read Again” T-shirt or those wishing to volunteer their time can visit the website <http://www.montanabookfestival.org/> ♦

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www.matelamt.com
Member of the NCTE Information Exchange, which allows reprinting of articles in other members' publications

MARK CALENDARS FOR OCT. 20

National Day on Writing to Celebrate 10th Anniversary

By Donna L. Miller

Celebrating its 10th anniversary Oct. 20, the National Day on Writing is an annual event founded by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) on the premise that writing is critical to literacy but needs greater attention and celebration.



In commemoration of this anniversary, NCTE has plans to dedicate the entire month of October to writing by sharing member insights, teaching tips, and other opportunities to revel in the power of writing.

Not only will NCTE members be invited to sign up to receive writing resources in their inbox each weekday throughout the month, but they are also invited to participate in the #WhyIWrite Social Media Campaign. Posts will go up each day in October. For the past nine years, millions of people have shared their responses and engaged in activities around #WhyIWrite.

The calendar below shares other important events throughout the month:

October 4 – #WhyIWrite on the Hill (Washington, DC)

NCTE members will visit all 100 Senate offices on Capitol Hill to remind legislators of the importance of writing and to ensure we have several sponsors for this year's resolution.

October 8 – The Moth Storytelling Event (New York, NY)

NCTE members are invited to attend an exclusive event in New York City where members of The Moth team will guide them in learning how to tell their own stories. The Moth promotes connec-

The Moth is an organization founded in 1999 to promote connection and visibility through the practice of personal storytelling. Because of their belief that stories connect us as humans and foster mutual understanding, the Moth partners with community organizations around the world to practice storytelling as an art form and a powerful tool of communication.

Through workshops and performance opportunities, participants shape selected life experiences into well-crafted stories and share them with members of their communities and beyond.

According to their website, the moth.org, "by honoring the individual experience, we can:

- challenge dominant narratives
- inspire greater confidence in storytellers
- deepen connection in community and spark empathy among listeners around the world."

October 14 – Writing for Empathy #NCTEchat

NCTE member Nicole Mirra will lead a Twitter chat around the role writing can play in fostering a critical, civic form of empathy in schools.

October 19 – Writing = Hope x Change / National Write-In

Join celebrated author Jacqueline Woodson in a virtual write-in as she guides aspiring writers through an exploration of why we write and how our words can transform our lives and those of others.

October 20 – National Day on Writing

People around the globe will share their love of writing via the #WhyIWrite hashtag. ♦

MATELA Membership Form

Please join/renew by filling out this form, making out a check, and mailing both to MATELA's treasurer at the address on the bottom of this form.

Name _____

Street/Box _____

City _____ Zip Code _____

E-mail Address _____

School _____

Grade Level _____

Phone (w/h) _____ (c) _____

PLEASE CHECK ONE:

Student membership: \$10 _____

Retired membership: \$10 _____

Regular yearly membership: \$25 _____

Special 3-year membership: \$65 _____

Special combined membership (includes MCTM, MSTa) \$51 _____

New member: _____ Renewal: _____

Mail your check and this form to
Dana Haring, MATELA Treasurer
620 First Avenue West, Kalispell, MT 59901

Or sign up online at www.matelamt.com
Credit cards accepted online only

Bobbitt Wins MATELA Distinguished Educator Award

By Donna L. Miller

Curt Bobbitt, who teaches at the University of Providence in Great Falls, will receive MATELA's Distinguished Educator Award during the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE) Educators' Conference in Billings, Oct. 18-19.



In making their selection, the MATELA Board considered the candidate's professional qualities, teaching effectiveness, and impact on the learning community.

In recommendations for the award, Bobbitt consistently received outstanding marks for knowledge of content, positive voice in education, and motivation/seriousness of purpose. As evidence of his motivation, the university professor has served as a reader for the English Literature Advanced Placement Exam and as a Standard Setting Panel member for the CLEP Examination in Literature (2015) and Humanities (2012) for the Educational Testing Service. He has also been a frequent presenter at MFPE's Annual Educators' Conferences.

According to Gregory Madson, Dean of Faculty at the University of Providence, "Dr. Bobbitt is a highly dedicated educator. I find him to be committed to academic excellence and standards. Through his numerous accomplishments, from teaching to professional development, he inspires and motivates our students." Bobbitt's colleagues refer to him as "a model of scholarly inquiry" and as source of "balance [from which] others can draw stability in the midst of sometimes frenetic activity."

With 44 years of service as a professional educator, Bobbitt received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in British and American Literature from Ball State University in 1989. Since 1998, he has served as a professor at the University of Providence, where



Photo by Julia Becker

Professor Curt Bobbitt (lower left) works with students at the University of Providence-Great Falls.

he currently delivers courses on literature, composition, descriptive linguistics, and cross-disciplinary studies.

In addition, he has served as MATELA's President and as the Region 7 Representative to the Standing Committee on Affiliates of the National Council of Teachers of English from September 2013-November 2017, representing Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Alberta, and British Columbia.

Bobbitt will receive his award at MATELA's Annual Business Meeting and Luncheon on Oct 19. All members and interested others are invited to attend. ♦

O'Connor Awarded NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award

By Donna L. Miller

Congratulations go to Jean O'Connor from Helena High School, who has been selected to receive the 2018 High School Teacher of Excellence Award from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

O'Connor is one of 14 high school teachers nationwide who will be awarded at the Secondary Section Luncheon Nov. 17, during the NCTE Annual Convention in Houston, Texas.

Established in 2001 by the NCTE Secondary Section, this award recognizes and celebrates high school classroom teachers who demonstrate excellent practices and contri-



Jean O'Connor

butions in the classroom.

Speaking to this excellence, one of O'Connor's colleagues, English teacher Jill Van Alstyne said, "For 37 years, Jean has created high-level, engaging educational experiences for high school students of all abilities, grades, socio-economic levels, and ethnicities. . . . Jean works tirelessly behind the scenes—quietly, effectively, modestly."

Also in support of O'Connor's nomination for the award, Helena High School Principal Steve Thennis commented on her exceptional teaching abilities and support of classroom teachers. He further described O'Connor as one who "always demonstrates a great deal of character, integrity and dedication. This has translated to building great rapport with students, parents, and staff."

For more information about the NCTE High School Teacher of Excellence Award, including past winners, see www2.ncte.org/high-school-teacher-of-excellenceaffiliate-award. ♦

Haaland to Deliver Keynote Address on Courage to Write at MFPE Conference

By Donna L. Miller

Tami Haaland, one of Elk River Writing Project's Directors, will deliver a keynote address in the Skyview High School Theatre on Friday, October 19 at 9:00 AM for the Writing Projects Under the Big Sky.



how "learning to trust the process" ultimately builds essential skills.

Co-sponsored by MATELA, Haaland has a rich *résumé* of achievements connected to writing. She is the author of three poetry collections, *What Does Not Return* (2018), *When We Wake in the Night* (2012), and *Breath in Every Room* (2001), which won the Nicholas Roerich First Book Award.

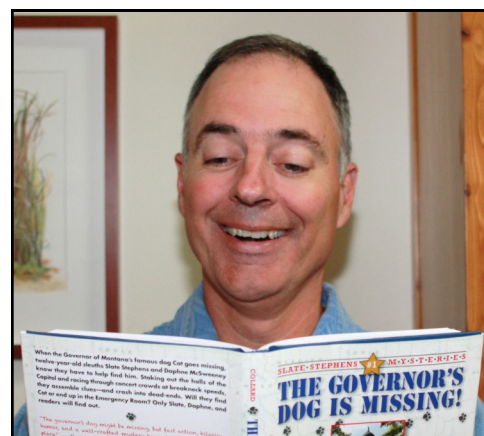
Not only a published author, Haaland is English Department Chair and a professor of English, philosophy, and modern languages at MSU-Billings. She has also taught creative writing at the Montana Women's Prison and helped launch a writing project at McKinley Elementary School through the Arts Without Boundaries program. In addition, from August 2013- October 2015, she was Montana's Poet Laureate, and while she served in that role, Montana Governor Steve Bullock consulted her about developing and promoting youth literacy programs.

Haaland earned her BA and an MA in English Literature from the University of Montana and an MFA in Creative Writing/Literature from Bennington College. ♦



Tami Haaland

Courtesy www.poetryfoundation.org



www.sneedcollardiii.com

Collard to present 'Soaring Through Writing Choices' at Educators' Conference Oct 18

Sneed Collard III, author of more than 80 award-winning nonfiction and fiction books for young people, will be one of MATELA's honored guests at the Educators' Conference in Billings, Oct. 18-19.

His keynote Oct. 18, entitled "Soaring through Writing Choices," will provide tips to help young writers "spread their literary wings." The address will be at 1 p.m. in the theater. His breakout session, "Revising Paragraphs—the Key to Great Writing," will provide logical and attainable steps for writing revision. This session will follow the keynote at 2 p.m. in Room 211. ♦

NCTE Annual Convention: Why Attend #NCTE18?



National Council of
Teachers of English

Each November thousands of literacy educators from across the country make the journey to a Convention that inspires their practice and rejuvenates their profession. They leave with strong strategies and best practices for teaching literacy, language, and composition. They learn new ideas for delivering instruction that engages students and addresses the most pressing needs within the school and district.

NCTE's Convention is the most historic annual literacy convening for teachers and educators. Attendees can expect to hear from leading educational voices as

well as nearly 300 national authors, all engaging together around the pressing topics of the field. Join us to establish new allies in the work of excellent teaching, new connections with luminaries and authors, and enough new books to fill entire shelves in classroom libraries. And that's just scratching the surface.

Participation Credits

Plan to attend the Convention with personal and school-based literacy goals in mind. Select sessions aligned to those goals and be prepared to explain how they will contribute to your professional know-how in these areas. NCTE provides a certificate of participation and has partnered with the University of San Diego to offer continuing education credits. Note that each state has different rules for recertification processes, so be sure to



Every year, thousands of English language arts teachers come together to share and learn at NCTE's annual convention.

check documentation requirements prior to the Convention. ♦

Article and photo courtesy NCTE Affiliate Exchange

MFPE OCTOBER CONVENTION

Conference Promises Professional Development; Social Interaction

By Donna L. Miller and Donna Bulatowicz

KeeP Calm and Teach On is the theme selected by planners of the Montana Federation of Public Employees Educator Conference (formerly MEA-MFT), which will be held at Skyview High School in Billings, Oct. 18-19.



a no-host meal and a program entitled “Validations, Vexations, and Victories,” Oct. 17 at 6 p.m. The session is worth one renewal unit. Following the meal, Dana Haring will facilitate a conference launch session with time designed for the reflective and responsive teacher. Session attendees are encouraged to bring a piece of their own writing to share and their own strategies of care. In this casual session, participants will build competence and collegiality through sharing writing victories and vexations in an open mike format.

Curriculum group planners have secured workshop presenters and keynote speakers for the professional development of their association members.

As a preconference session, MATELA members are invited to join colleagues at the Rib and Chop House located at 1849 Majestic Lane in Billings where MATELA will kick-off the conference with

During the main conference, Oct. 18-19, members are encouraged to enjoy refreshments and the opportunity to interact socially in the MATELA and Writing Projects Under the Big Sky (WPUBS) shared hospitality room, which will be located in Skyview High School’s Room 127. The conference will also feature workshops from MATELA and WPUBS presenters in the below schedule.

Thursday, Oct. 18 Sectionals

<u>Time</u>	<u>Room</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Presenter</u>
7:00 a.m.	127	MATELA Executive Board Meeting	Sue Stolp
8:00 a.m.	210	Mock Trial in an ELA Classroom	Daniel Johnson
8:00 a.m.	215	Expand Student Writing in Science (WPUBS)	Lorrie Henrie-Koski
9:00 a.m.	210	Figure It Out	Curt Bobbitt
9:00 a.m.	125	Increase Knowledge/Skills/Dispositions; Help Ells Succeed Academically	Jioanna Carjuzaa
9:00 a.m.	211	Walk in the Footsteps of Characters: Study Abroad Enhances Literature	Joyce Herbeck
9:00 a.m.	213	Integrating Science and Literacy	Eileen Patrick
10:00 a.m.	237	The 411 on Literary Analysis (WPUBS)	Donna L. Miller
10:00 a.m.	215	Teaching Trauma: Best Practices for Teaching Traumatic Events (WPUBS)	Maria Watson
11:00 a.m.	213	Writing into the Day: More Than Just a Prompt	Michael Galt
11:00 a.m.	211	Belt Valley Shakespeare: From Rural Montana to Edinburgh’s Central Hall	Jeff Ross
11:00 a.m.	210	“Compassion, Imagination, and Wonder”: The Charlotte Huck Book Awards	Donna Bulatowicz
11:00 a.m.	215	Teaching Informed Argument for Solution-Oriented Citizenship (WPUBS)	Casey Olsen
12:00 p.m.	210	Kaizena to Support Your Writing Instruction	Brynn Cadigan
12:00 p.m.	213	Engaging Secondary Students in Montana Poetry Out Loud	Monica Grable
12:00 p.m.	215	International Youth Silent Film Festival: Yellowstone Regional (WPUBS)	Allison Wynhoff- Olsen
1:00 p.m.	Theatre	Keynote: <i>Soaring Through Writing Choices</i>	Sneed Collard
1:00 p.m.	210	Russell for Learning: Connecting Students with a “Sense of Place”	Melissa Werber
2:00 p.m.	211	Revising Paragraphs—the Key to Great Writing	Sneed Collard
2:00 p.m.	210	Hook Beginning Readers with Books They Can’t Resist	Joyce Herbeck
2:00 p.m.	215	IEFA and Holocaust Education: The Writing Project Way (WPUBS)	Marcia Beaumont

See SECTIONALS Page 7

MATELA SECTIONALS: Continued from Page 6

Thursday Sectionals Continued

2:00 p.m.	212	The Landscapes of Savage: How Students Can Publish and Celebrate (WPUBS)	Allison Wynhoff- Olsen
3:00 p.m.	215	How Do You Figure? (WPUBS)	Curt Bobbitt
3:00 p.m.	210	Here's Your Comma, Mr. Madison: Closely Reading Founding Documents	Caitlin Chiller
3:00 p.m.	211	Close Reading and Creative Writing Come Together!	Dana Haring
3:00 p.m.	213	Guiding Close Reading	Donna L. Miller
4:00 p.m.	211	Whooping Cranes, Electric Sheep, and Ecocriticism	Jeff Ross
4:00 p.m.	213	Multi-Voiced Novels for Empathy and Understanding	Sue Stolp

Friday, Oct. 19 Sectionals

<u>Time</u>	<u>Room</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Presenter</u>
7:00 a.m.	215	Friday Morning Coffee Hour with WPUBS	Donna L. Miller
8:00 a.m.	210	"The" Research Paper Doesn't Exist. That's Great News for Us!	Rebecca Chatham
8:00 a.m.	211	Interacting with Shakespeare	Mary Dea
8:00 a.m.	213	Literacy and Libraries in Finland: Teacher Education and Study Abroad	Ann Ewbank
9:00 a.m.	211	Incorporating Coding into the English/Language Arts Classroom	Michael Galt
9:00 a.m.	213	Middle Grades ELA Proficiency Trends and Instructional Practices	Heather Fisher
9:00 a.m.	210	Books that Address Social Justice and Equity: Jane Addams Award	Joyce Herbeck
9:00 a.m.	Theater	Writing Projects Keynote (WPUBS)	Tami Haaland
10:00 a.m.	215	IEFA and Holocaust Education: The Writing Project Way (WPUBS)	Marcia Beaumont
10:00 a.m.	212	Walking Through the Holocaust: The Gallery Walk and Writing (WPUBS)	Maria Watson
10:00 a.m.	210	Diverse Children's Literature	Donna Bulatowicz
10:00 a.m.	211	What Happens When We Don't Give Students All the Rules?	Rebecca Chatham
10:00 a.m.	213	Reading Through GREEN APPLE Lenses	Donna L. Miller
11:00 a.m.	Theatre	Keynote: <i>Unbelievable...but True! Creating Nonfiction and Historical Fiction Through Research and Storytelling</i>	Jen Bryant
12:00 p.m.	127	MATELA Business Meeting	Sue Stolp
12:00 p.m.	215	Using Tech to Teach Tribal Sovereignty (WPUBS)	Lisa Borgstrom
12:00 p.m.	210	Teaching Montana Indian Poetry with "Birthright: Born to Poetry"	Carol Hearron
2:00 p.m.	211	Creative Non-Fiction: How to Write—How to Help Your Students Write It.	Jen Bryant
2:00 p.m.	209	The Uncommon Resource of Commonlit.org	Dana Haring
2:00 p.m.	212	Using Bulletin Boards as Instructional Tools	Donna L. Miller
3:00 p.m.	210	New Award-Winning Titles for Young Adults Address Current Issues	Joyce Herbeck
4:00 p.m.	211	EdReady English Orientation	Jaime Middleton

Banned Books Week: Celebrating Your Right to Read

by Donna L. Miller



For years, my students have written in humanities, literature, education, or writing courses about the importance of critical and creative thinking when reading another author's work. Arguing that books inspire thought and

action, these writers have not only provided important rationales for reading books about difficult topics but discussed the ability of those books to offer diverse perspectives and to stretch thinking.

Because I believe that writing is more authentic when the topics are of interest, relevance, and value to the writers, I take advantage of current events and harness students' natural enthusiasm and passion about topics that may matter. Given that philosophy, it is appropriate to write about censorship during Banned Books Week.

This year, the American Library Association (ALA) has designated Sept. 23-29 as Banned Books Week. Posters advertising the event feature a hand holding a megaphone emerging from an open book with the words "Speak Out for Banned Books." The poster boasts a message similar to that of Theodor Geisel—also known as Dr. Seuss—who created the Lorax to speak for the trees, "for the trees have no tongues" (1971).

In that same spirit, this year's slogan "Banning Books Silences Stories" is a reminder that everyone needs to speak out against the tide of censorship. After all, in the words of the Lorax, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not" (Seuss, n.p.).

According to the ALA, "Banned Books Week emphasizes the freedom to choose or the freedom to express one's opinion even if that opinion might be considered unorthodox or unpopular and stresses the importance of ensuring the availa-



bility of those unorthodox or unpopular viewpoints to all who wish to read them" (n.p.).

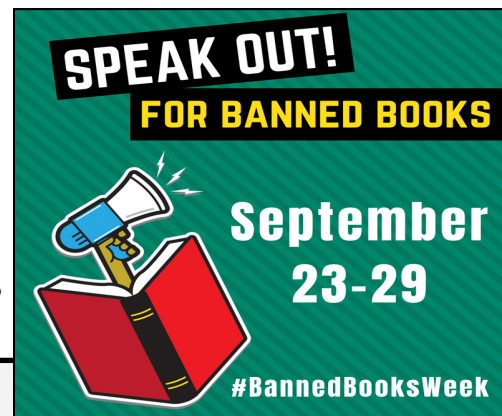
To celebrate the benefits of free and open access to information, I

Figure 1. *Writing Invitation:* Celebrating Your Right to Read

Topic: Select and read one or more frequently challenged books; choose classics or books that are likely to appear on the AP Exam. Check with me if you are unsure about a book's suitability, since I want this assignment to serve you in multiple ways. I also want you to read at least two reviews or scholarly articles that address the book(s) you choose for your paper. To provide a starting point for literary criticism, visit www.ipl.org. Children's Literature in Education, English Journal, The ALAN Review, The Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy, Booklist magazine, American Libraries, Signal Journal, and The Horn Book Magazine are all credible sources to consult.

Organization: You might wish to begin with information about the practice of censorship through book banning, with a quote, an anecdote about personal experience with censorship, or even a startling scenario, warning about the effects of censorship. Perhaps follow with how you feel about book banning, supporting your own opinion with that of authorities on the subject. Then, in your thesis tell which book(s) you read, identifying the reasons they are frequently challenged and whether you deem them worthy of that status. In the body, discuss the areas of the book you feel may create dissonance for some readers, quoting passages to illustrate. To explore merits of the book, quote valuable passages, where life lessons or redeemable qualities, or reasons to read the book occur. Next, report what scholars and critics have to say about the merits or shortcomings of your book(s). Finally, close with your position on the subject of banned books in general and of this book/these books in particular. Based on this collected, balanced evidence, does the book deserve to be banned? Is it worthy of its objectionable status? Would you recommend this book to anyone? Why or why not?

Additional Criteria: Include a Works Cited page.



typically invite students to write a persuasive piece on a book or books featured on the list of Frequently Challenged Books compiled by the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF). Figure 1 shares a model designed for students enrolled in an Advanced Placement English course. Students are always surprised and sometimes even express outrage that some of their favorite titles hold a place on the list.

Before students embark on their research, reading, and writing, I provide some background about the ALA's advocacy and the purpose of Banned Books Week and share some definitions, telling students that a challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person/group, while banning is the removal of those materials.

After a rousing discussion, students typically conclude that challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view; rather, they are an attempt to remove materials from a school's curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access to that material. Due to the commitment of librarians, teachers, parents, students, and other concerned citizens, most challenges are unsuccessful, and most materials are retained in the school curriculum or library collection.

See BANNED Page 9

BANNED BOOKS: FROM PAGE 8

Students Question What 'Difficult' Means in Terms of Book Challenges

Next, we discuss why books get challenged. I begin that exchange by stating that books are usually challenged with the best intentions—to protect others, frequently children, from difficult ideas and information. I can always count on one student to ask, “But who gets to define difficult?” After all, these challenges are acts of censorship and limit intellectual freedom, topics about which many have passionate opinions. For example, according to Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas: “Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions. It is the one un-American act that could most easily defeat us.”

The writing invitation in Figure 1 always generates some passionate writing about books labelled “inappropriate” or “unsuited to age group” because of their profanity, violence, sexual explicitness, and/or issues such as suicide or drug use.

In 2017, the top two most frequently challenged books were *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. Asher’s book is a New York Times bestseller. It resurfaced on the list as a controversial book

after Netflix aired a television series by the same name. According to the OIF, “this young adult novel was challenged and banned in multiple school districts because it discusses suicide” (n.p.).

Alexie’s book has been consistently challenged since its publication for acknowledging issues such as poverty, alcoholism, and sexuality. “This National Book Award winner was challenged in school curriculums (sic) because of profanity and situations that were deemed sexually explicit” (OIF statistics n.p.). For years in my teaching life, I have approached difficult topics by letting a book initiate discussion. In fact, as English teachers try to balance reading as an act of pleasure and reading as a tool for increasing academic prowess in their students, they might look to what Don Gallo (2008) called bold books. According to Gallo, these are the best books because they deal in the gray areas of life.

Although these books are often targeted as controversial, Gallo says, “Good books have always caused people to think, and since few of us think alike, controversy is guaranteed” (116). Bold books provide the primer for living life in its good, bad, and ugly reality. “And there’s no better place to explore the larger, diverse, often scary world than from the safe distance a book provides” (117).

Like Gallo, I’d much rather youth explore drug use or the consequences of sexual promiscuity through a book than through personal experience. Reading texts that feature tough topics not only imparts information but also assists readers in forming opinions after encountering multiple perspectives, especially about controversial political viewpoints. Using a text as a tool for tough talk also affords those having discussion some distance from the topic, which can be filtered through a character’s reaction or opinion. This attribution provides a level of safety for adolescents who are still discovering their own identities and forming individual philosophies.

Furthermore, by using contentious topics as catalysts for sparking conversations on complex social issues, teachers raise social consciousness and support collaborative conversation. In an article I wrote for *English Journal*, “Tough Talk as an Antidote to Bullying” (Miller, 2012), I not only argue that discussing contentious topics is a method for teaching civil discourse and making a difference in the world, but I also share a list of bold texts, several protocols for tackling tough topics, and a rationale for inviting critical thinking about controversial social subjects into the classroom.

Students who experience opportunities to read controversial literature and to critically examine literature like that on the list of Frequently Challenged Books develop civic awareness, critical thinking



Artwork courtesy of the American Library Association website:
www.ala.org

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STUDENT COMPETITION ADDS MORE MONTANA CITIES

Coming in February: More Poetry Regional Competitions

By Monica Grable



Entering its 14th year, Montana Poetry Out Loud (begun by the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the Poetry Foundation and implemented in the state by the Montana Arts Council) has long offered high school students the opportunity to engage with the work of poets through a personal competition-based experience.

From its inception through its 11th year, Montana Poetry Out Loud held only two regional contests, both in the western part of the state (Dillon and Missoula), adding a third regional in Columbus the past two program years. Unsurprisingly, most participating schools were those within easy reach of a regional contest. However, the sites have broadened to include other areas of the state.

While not all regionals have yet been solidified, commitments to host events have already been made by University of Providence in Great Falls, Flathead Valley Community College in Kalispell, Montana State University in Billings, and the University of Montana in Dillon. The contests is in February. Teachers can help prepare their students by visiting the website <https://art.mt.gov/pol>

Following a pyramid structure not unlike the National Spelling Bee, students begin their work in the classroom, led, coached and inspired by their own classroom teacher, before advancing to a school-wide competition, followed by a regional competition, and finally the state finals that ultimately sends one winner from each state to the National Recitation Contest in Washington D.C.

As the national Poetry Out Loud website summarizes: "Poetry

Out Loud encourages students to learn about great poetry through memorization and recitation. This program helps students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about literary history and contemporary life."

While these baseline aspects of the program are certainly accurate, what so many teachers will intimate is the extent to which students wear the poems, take them to heart, and rise to a level of spoken word artistry one would not expect from youth of their age. For many, participation in the program alters their world view, elevates their sense of self, and inspires their own writing.

For the upcoming program year, an initiative aimed at expanding participation throughout the state has been launched with a goal of increasing the number of regionals from three to seven.

To that end, the Montana Arts Council has sought partnerships with Montana colleges and universities and has found partners well-suited to hosting the regional contests and facilitating a broad range of participation in each region: by students and their high school teachers, by area writers, and by the community at large.

Further goals of the initiative include limiting the distance to a regional event to 150 miles or fewer (offering travel funds to those schools at a greater distance), providing students with on-campus exposure to a college or university near them while showcasing arts programs on those campuses, and engaging future teachers of English in the program to ensure its future growth.

To become involved in the hosting of a regional event or to begin a Poetry Out Loud program at your school, please contact Monica Grable, Art Education Director of the Montana Arts Council, at monica.grable@mt.gov or 444-6522. ♦

From Page 9 **BANNED: Using Social Criticism to Encourage Persuasive Writing**

skills, and argument literacy. With these analysis, argument, and public conversation skills, we give students access to forms of intellectual capital that have power in both the corporate and the academic worlds. These skills also provide access for those wishing to enter political and social conversations as they vie for resources or rally to promote positive change. After all, a thinking, democratic populace should possess the skills necessary for interrogating social and political practices and policies.

Works Cited

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OPI UPDATE:

Earn Credit for Professional Development: Online or Face-to-Face

Office of Public Instruction Encourages Teachers To Be Part of the Community

By Christy Mock-Stutz

As school begins, teachers across Montana are busy getting their classrooms ready for students. Time, energy, resources are all spent focusing on student growth and achievement throughout the year.



However, it is also important to take time to consider how we are going to take care of ourselves during this school year. We need to spend time, energy, and resources on ourselves to be the best educators we can be.

At the Office of Public Instruction (OPI), we work to support teachers throughout the year. Taking care of your professional needs while being part of a greater education community is rewarding and provides support for you and your fellow teachers.

Throughout the year, we provide many opportunities for professional learning, in a wide range of topics and content areas.

To start, we offer several conferences. Attending these conference is a great way to connect with other educators and learn some-

thing new. You may even be interested in presenting something you do in your classroom! Be sure to look for these opportunities:

The Montana Data-Use Conference is in Bozeman during September. The Educator's Conference is in Billings in October. In January and February, look for the Assessment Conferences and the Indian Education for All Best Practices Conference. In June, MBI will be held in Bozeman. For registration and specific dates, simply go to the OPI website, opi.mt.gov.

In addition to these in-person opportunities, OPI offers free, online learning as well. Two new English Language Arts courses have opened recently:

Taking Reading to the Next Level – Teaching strategically using predicting, summarizing, and visualizing

Supporting Readers with Textbooks – Teaching strategies for helping students access complex texts

In a digital format, the Hub offers several wonderful writing courses and a variety of classes in other content areas. Simply visit opi.mt.gov/learninghub to register for these free, online courses.

Whether you take online courses, attend conferences, or build a community in your neighborhood, stay involved! Stay active and keep learning. Be part of the Montana educators' community! ♦

'UPDATE' Earns Newsletter of Excellence Award from NCTE

By Sue Stolp

MATELA's *Update* has been named as a recipient of the 2018 NCTE Affiliate Newsletter of Excellence Award by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).



The judges noted that *Update* featured "interesting and informative articles that were thoroughly enjoyable to read as well as relevant to membership." Furthermore, judges complimented "the variety of MATELA's outreach to writing project sites and the news of professional development opportunities through the NEH and other organizations."

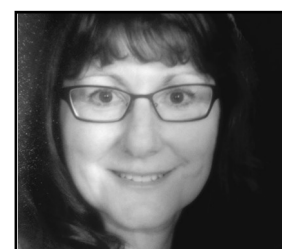
The award winners will be announced at the NCTE Annual Convention in Houston, during the Affiliate Roundtable Breakfast on Nov. 18. *Update* is one of eight recipients of this award this year. Established in 1992, this award recognizes outstanding newsletters of affiliates of NCTE that have published a minimum of three newsletters from May through the program deadline May 1.

Newsletters are judged on content, quality of writing, a clearly defined purpose for the publication, a user-friendly format, and the use of graphics to aid the overall effectiveness of the newsletter.

MATELA board member Katie Kotynski, a retired teacher and technology coordinator from Great Falls, is the talented editor of *Update*, although she is looking for a successor by the end of this academic year.

Please contact current MATELA president Sue Stolp at sue.stolp@bsd7.org if you would like to share your interest in the editing and publication of *Update*.

Sources: Information from NCTE News Release and correspondence from Julie Rucker. ♦



Katie Kotynski, current editor/technology chair, is seeking someone to take over her responsibilities. Email sue.stolp@bsd7.org if interested.



Dana Haring, Treasurer
620 First Avenue West
Kalispell, MT 59901

**Please consider sharing your talent and expertise with
MATELA!**

Upcoming publication deadlines:

MEJ: June 1

Fall UPDATE: Sept. 1

Winter UPDATE: Dec. 1

Spring UPDATE: March 1

Printing courtesy of University of Providence - Great Falls

Submit articles for consideration via our website at www.matelamt.com/publications

All submissions must be in RTF or .docx format, no columns or extra spaces between paragraphs, and without embedded graphics or photos. **Include a byline** with your name the way you would like it to appear at the beginning of your copy.

If your piece includes graphics or photos, please send these jpg files as separate attachments.