

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

NCTE NATIONAL CONVENTION

Lessons Learned Suggest Ways to Keep Collaborating

By Christy Mock-Stutz



Attending professional conferences always provides me inspiration, knowledge, and energy to move forward. This year at NCTE 2017 was no different. Meeting new colleagues, re-connecting with others, and imagining new ways to consider partnerships and collaboration were my big takeaways this year.

With budget cuts at the federal, state, and district level, it seems like an impossible task to understand how I can support English Language Arts teachers across Montana with high-quality professional learning opportunities. Being at NCTE reminded me clearly how important networking and collaboration are in building teacher leader communities.

I had the distinct pleasure of presenting “Building a Statewide Professional Learning Community” with several wonderful colleagues: Beverly Chin, University of Montana, Montana Writing Project, and former NCTE and MATELA president; Sue Stolp, Chief Joseph Middle School--Bozeman, and current MATELA president; as well as Bridgett Paddock, AP language teacher at Skyview High School--Billings, Golden Apple Winner, and Elk River Writing Project.

Together, we presented on our own statewide professional learning community: The MT Writing Teacher PLC. The participants in our session discussed their difficulties with PLC’s (lack of focus, scheduling issues, trouble staying connected) and realized our online model could help them get on track and stay on track with connecting the groups of teachers they wanted to get together.

Another takeaway was the importance of considering new partnerships. In slim fiscal times, we need to share our resources so all our students have equal opportunities to learn, share, and grow. By sharing resources within schools, districts, communities, and our state, we can build stronger communities of practice for teachers.

Montana is full of professional experts in education, and by collaborating, we can ensure success for teachers going forward. Besides MATELA, another statewide network of educators is the leadership of the three National Writing Project Sites that we have here in the state: Montana Writing Project, Missoula; Elk River Writing Project, Billings; and Yellowstone Writing Project, Bozeman. The



Photo by Dana Haring

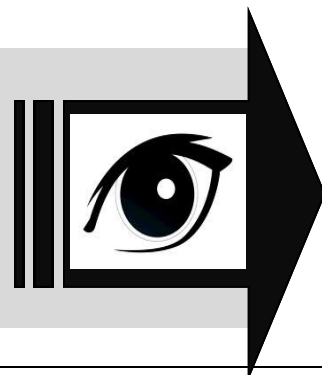
The following MATELA members presented on how to build a state-wide professional learning community: Beverly Chin, Christy Mock-Stutz, Sue Stolp, Bridgett Paddock.

leaders at these sites are committed to working together to continue to provide the high-quality support for writing instruction, despite budget cuts at the national level.

As NCTE shows me each year, keeping connected to fellow educators is key to building professional communities and strengthening teacher effectiveness. Be sure to stay connected MATELA, join the monthly online Writing PLC to have conversations with fellow educators, and keep current with educational practices at the Teacher Learning Hub – opi.mt.gov/learninghub. ♦

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Conferences, Conventions, Contests Announced for Winter, Spring

Indian Ed for All Best Practices Conference March 4-5

Registration for the 12th Annual Indian Education for All Best Practices Conference is now open.

Because of a 200-person cap this year, event organizers encourage early registration. Link to register: opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education

Slated for March 4-5, the conference will be held in Helena on Carroll College's campus in All Saints Hall. Mini-Institutes begin on Sunday from 1-4 p.m., followed by Cultural Continuum Comedian Kasey Nicholson. The conference officially opens March 5 with a keynote address, followed by 25 break-out sessions.

Registration for Sunday-only attendance is \$20 and Monday-only \$25 or \$45 for both days, which includes a continental breakfast and pizza/pasta bar for lunch.

Remaking Monsters and Heroines Summer Institute

March 1 is the deadline to apply for a two-week institute on adapting classic literature for contemporary audiences. Accepted instructors receive a \$2,100 stipend to cover travel/expenses.

The institute will focus on Frankenstein, Cinderella, and the adapta-

tions of these classic texts. It will be held at the University of Arkansas. Visit monstersandheroines.uark.edu to apply.

Letters About Literature, Student Writing Contest

The Library of Congress' (LOC) Letters About Literature competition deadline is fast approaching. If your students plan on participating in this year's competition, please note that all letters are due for submission by Jan. 12. Interested individuals can find more information on the Letters About Literature (LAL) contest by visiting the website: www.read.gov/letters/.

A reading and writing contest for students in grades 4-12, the LAL encourages youth to read a book, poem, or speech and then to write a letter to the author (living or dead) about how the book affected them personally. Sponsored by Montana's Center for the Book, a program of Humanities Montana, the contest asks writers to explore how an author's work changed their personal and world views.

Because the letters will be judged for audience, purpose, originality, grammatical conventions, clarity, organization, and specific details to support main ideas, the LAL contest supports curricular goals while inviting passion, reflection, creativity, and engagement.

See CONFERENCES Page 3

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From Page 2

Writing Project Conference, Poet Laureate Announces Contest/Magazine

Writers who meet the criteria and communicate a unique or powerful point of view could advance to national-level judging.

Writing Project Conference Feb. 10

Yellowstone Writing Project is hosting a one-day conference for educators, *Fire on the Page: Writing to the Bone*, at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman Feb. 10. The focus will be writing in museums and using archives, including on-site resources at the museum, as well as digital sources from renowned Montana writer Ivan Doig.

Registration will open early January and OPI renewal credits will be earned. We will update our website when registration opens: yellowstonewritingproject.com
Email yellowstonewp@gmail.com with any questions.

Board Meeting To Be Online—All Welcome to Attend

The winter board meeting will be held Jan. 27 in the online format, time to be determined. Christy Mock-Stutz will be in touch regarding time and how to access Go To Meeting for all to participate.

Poet Laureate Announces Literary Arts Magazine Contest

Montana's Poet Laureate, Lowell Jaeger, recently announced a call for submissions for a literary magazine dedicated to the relevance of Montana's young adults to today's vibrant cultural conversation. *New Montana Voices*, an anthology of poems, fiction, essays, and photos, is now accepting submissions for publication.

Montana High School and non-traditional students (grades 9-12) in public, private, and homeschool settings are eligible to submit. This is an opportunity for young artists not only to exercise their creativity but also to have their voices heard.

Interested individuals are encouraged to contact steve@newmontanavoices.com or Humanities Montana

The deadline for the first round of submissions is Dec. 31 with second round submissions due May 31.

First place prizes of \$200 each for best poem, story or essay, and photo will be awarded for each round of submissions, second place: \$100, and third place: \$50.

In addition, teachers and librarians will be eligible for a \$500 cash prize awarded to the teacher or librarian who best motivates students to write and submit quality work. The winning teacher or librarian will be named "Writing Teacher of the Year" and her/his photo and bio will also be published in *New Montana Voices*.

New Board Members Elected; 'MEJ' Published

Sue Stolp will take the reins from Caitlin Chiller as the new president of MATELA. She is a communication arts middle-school teacher in Bozeman.

Donna Bulatowicz from MSU-Bozeman is the new first vice president while Jeff Ross from Belt Schools takes over as second vice president. She will be in charge of the MEA-MFT conference and he will take on the role of membership chair.

Brynn Cadigan and Dana Haring retain their positions as secretary and treasurer, respectively, and round out the executive board.

See page 2 of this newsletter for a full board listing. Or visit our website at matelamt.com. Contact information for all board members is posted on the website.

The *Montana English Journal's* first digital edition has published. Check out some great writing, lesson plans and creative fiction at <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mej/> ♦

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

NCTE SPEAKER REVIEW

Graphic Novelist Gareth Hinds Recreates Classics

by Sue Stolp; Curt Bobbitt



first became acquainted with the work of Gareth Hinds last year, when his graphic



novel *The Odyssey* was one of the texts in a young adult literature course I was helping teach at MSU-Bozeman.

"As a former sixth grade social studies teacher, I had taught elements of Homer's epic poem, and I was amazed at the detail of Hinds' bold watercolor images as well as the author's adherence to the original work. My copy of Hinds' *The Odyssey* that resides in my current seventh grade language arts classroom is daily in the hands of a student during independent reading time, and I am often witness to awestruck faces of readers of all abilities who are mesmerized by the author's craft. ~Sue Stolp

Graphic novels have a magical storytelling quality that, according to Hinds, who recently spoke at the NCTE Annual Convention in St. Louis, include "tone, voice, atmosphere, characters, and setting; all the elements of a story in a different medium."

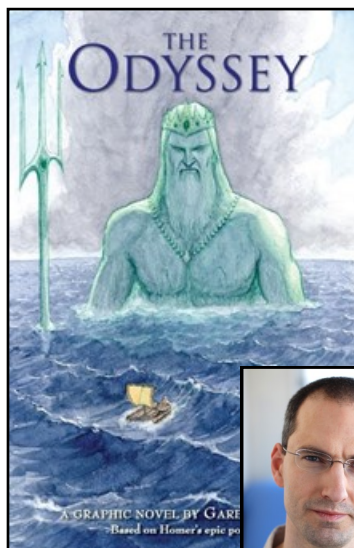
Hinds elaborated about the reasons that graphic novels have a place in classrooms with the following points:

- They are multi-modal, so reading these works uses more parts of the brain.
- Graphic novels tend to have rich vocabulary.
- Visuals allow for better engagement with emotions, symbols, and themes.

Furthermore, graphic novels can be used for a variety of purposes when teaching literature:

- As a teaser to the story
- As a substitution for struggling or reluctant readers
- For side-by-side comparisons
- For enhancing visual literacy, including text design, formatting, and style
- For making inferences about the story through images alone

While graphic novels have been criticized when used as replacements for written texts, Hinds emphasize several elements that



Gareth Hinds

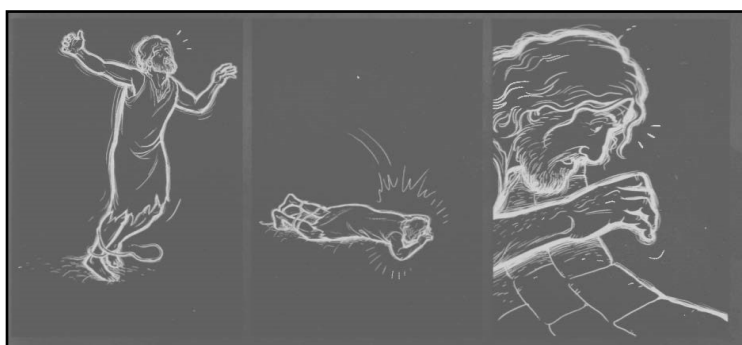


resonate with teachers in terms of language-arts instruction:

- The words in graphic novels are more impactful due to their economy. In fact, a study by the University of Oregon Center for Teaching and Learning cited that comic books/graphic novels reveal more "rare words" per 1,000 than other types of texts.
- Language of cinema can be utilized when discussing images: Long shots are used as "establishing shots" to depict a setting; whereas, close-up shots reveal character emotion. Teachers can have students write the description, dialogue, and inner thoughts of characters using the images of graphic novels as inspiration. Truly, a picture can speak a thousand (or at least several) words.
- Emotions of characters are more readily available to students through both color and visuals that capture readers' attention.

Three sample panels from the graphic version of "The Pit and the Pendulum" dramatize how Hinds blends several of these advantages. The white lines on the black background emphasize the darkness of the pit and the fright as the narrator describes how he tripped and fell while in total darkness.

These component drawings appear among six pages with the narra-



tor's words above only the first and last pages.

Overall, graphic novels are not just for reluctant readers; they serve to enhance both visual literacy and understanding of literature, and, according to Hinds, they allow us to discuss *more* about texts.

Hinds chooses to focus on the classics: In addition to *The Odyssey*, which his website calls his "magnum opus," Hinds has created graphic novel versions of the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *King Lear*.

His most recent (2017) publication is entitled *Poe: Stories and Poems*, which concisely retells seven of Edgar Allen Poe's iconic works.

"While I (Sue Stolp) am excited to pick up the *Poe* graphic novel to enhance my reading to middle school students of "The Tell-Tale Heart," Curt Bobbitt will elaborate on the use of the Shakespeare volumes.

Hinds shared the stage in St. Louis with two high-school teachers who have used his books to teach. Both Eric Kallenborn and Ronell Whitaker, teachers in Missouri high schools, spoke enthusiastically about their students' engagement with Shakespeare's stories *and* his words.

See HINDS Page 6

AFFILIATE HAPPENINGS AT NCTE, ST. LOUIS

President Stolp Muses on Co-Chairing Roundtable, Business Meeting

by Sue Stolp



A satisfying start to my new role as MATELA president was being part of the **Affiliate Extravaganza** at the recent November NCTE Annual Convention in St. Louis.



University of Providence Liaison Curt Bobbitt composed an attractive and comprehensive handout that he and I used to chair a roundtable discussion with other affiliates to share ideas, and which also served as a reminder of all the ways in which our association is currently involved in productive partnerships within the state of Montana.

MATELA's partnership with MEA/MFT, joint memberships with state math (MCTM) and science (MSTA) curriculum groups, collaboration with OPI's ELA Coordinator Christy Mock-Stutz, and support of WELL (Writing Education for Learners and Leaders), which provides writing workshops in rural areas, are evidence of this productivity.

In addition, our newsletter, *Update*, is published three times a year and recently won a 2017 Newsletter of Excellence Award.

Annual Business Meeting

Three resolutions were proposed, discussed, and approved by attendees of the Annual Business Meeting of the NCTE.

The first resolution, "Support for Undocumented Students in the English Classroom," was discussed at length, with aspects of the language of the resolution dissected for clarification and accuracy. This resolution calls for renewal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program for the protection of all undocumented K-20 students. The motion was made to include protection of young teachers who had entered the United States under DACA, and the motion was approved.



Sue Stolp, Beverly Chin, and Dana Haring accept the Affiliate Award for Excellence at the Affiliate Roundtable Breakfast, Nov. 19. MATELA also earned the newsletter of excellence award.



Photo by Curt Bobbitt



Photo by Curt Bobbitt

Roundtable chaired by Curt Bobbitt and Sue Stolp, MATELA president. Bobbitt and Stolp described to the participants MATELA's numerous partnerships and their contribution to the association's goals.

The second resolution was "Professional Learning for In-service Teachers" and focused on high quality professional learning to give teachers the necessary strategies to deliver effective writing instruction. Attendees posed questions as to why only writing, not reading, was the focus of this resolution. Discussion ensued around these questions.

The third resolution was "Amplifying the Voice of Literacy Teachers" and proposed that NCTE advocate that literacy teachers embrace opportunities to tell their stories. Again, some fine tuning of language followed, which added that NCTE both advocate for and give *support* to teachers in this endeavor.

Affiliate Roundtable Breakfast

Region 7, of which MATELA is part, was represented at the breakfast by educators from Montana, Oregon, and Wyoming.

Millie Davis, Senior Developer for Affiliates and Director of the Intellectual Freedom Center for NCTE, was honored in light of her impending retirement. Doug Hesse, Past President of NCTE, acknowledged Millie as "the vital voice of reason on the Illinois prairie." I have had the pleasure of getting to know Millie through my involvement with MATELA and NCTE and will miss her positive presence. ♦



Photo by Curt Bobbitt

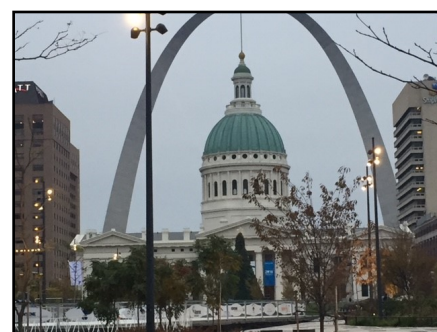


Photo by Sue Stolp

NEW TEACHERS From Page 9

Miller Designs Website to Help Shape Literary Discussions, Writing

By Katie Kotynski

W

hen health issues forced her into early retirement, Donna Miller still wanted to help teachers and students improve their writing and critical thinking skills. Some might think she would write a book or do some consulting. However, she went with a resource for a modern audience: a website.



Her website, thinkingzone.org, contains resources for new teachers and experienced alike, both those struggling for their first lesson plan to those who need to enliven a stagnant routine; and her teaching helpers are affordable, anywhere from \$1-\$5 each.

According to Miller, the materials available at Thinking Zone have been tested in classrooms and across grade levels—from grade school through college. While many of them are targeted for high school and post-secondary audiences, minor adaptations on the teacher's part will make them workable across grade levels.

Miller said she hates to associate a book with a particular grade-level: "I hesitate to label these books and ideas because labels can inform as well as stigmatize or alienate. With a label, someone might think a book like *The Giver* is only for middle school readers, when high school readers often get much more from Lois Lowry's novel when led to think deeply," she said.

"Teachers who know their students are in the best place to perform the selection and the tweaking of any products to fit their contexts and ability levels," Miller said. She knows that teachers are professional and can differentiate as needed. Her website offers three types of resources: Talking Points, Reader Response, and Think Abouts.



Sample Talking Points

Talking Points offers a selection of thought-provoking questions and thinking prompts on 26 different texts. Each question set frames the literary experience with guide posts for inquiry and reflection. *Talking Points* can be purchased for individual titles or as a soft cover, 77-page book. The book opens with four chapters of background and rationale information that supports students as producers of knowledge, explains the power of talking, and shares guidelines for how teachers might leverage dialogue as a pedagogical tool that will support students as thinkers, writers, and test-takers. That exposition is followed by reading guides for 26 thought-provoking texts, both classic and contemporary.

Whether a teacher designs learning experiences using a Socratic Seminar, a Paideia Seminar, Literature Circles, Reading Workshop, or other approach, Talking Points invite thought-provoking discussion. These questions are not predicated on memorization; instead, they are designed to promote critical and creative thinking.

Talking Points not only frames the literary experience with guide posts for inquiry and reflection, it also provides an effective method for managing classrooms and for maximizing time-on-task. The structured interaction of *Talking Points* allows students to remain in charge of discussions, yet still gives reassurance to teachers that discussion is productive, that thematic points are not passed over, and that a book is not only read but truly experienced.

So if you are looking for new ideas on how to start deep literary discussions or how to inspire good writing, be sure to visit The Thinking Zone. ♦

HINDS From Page 4

Artistic Choices for Characters, Costumes, Background Engage Students in Themes

A panel from the first act of *Romeo and Juliet* pictures Romeo's dreamy dialog about Rosaline with Benvolio.

Hinds acknowledged the dimension of interpretation the artist of a graphic version contributes.

Drawing/coloring the figures requires decisions about height, build, complexion, and expression. Clothing and hairstyle for Portia, the Fool, and Lady Macbeth grant the artist influence.

For the witches' first appearance in *Macbeth*, for instance, Hinds perches the hags in a large tree wearing animal skulls as headdresses for their enigmatic plans



for their next meeting.

Maps, supplemental drawings, and author's notes add to Hinds's treatment of canonical works.

In the Poe volume, he includes "The Poe Checklist," where he lists a dozen themes appearing in many of Poe's stories and poems, each one with a tiny icon, for instance "darkness," "premature burial," and "creepy animals." At the start of each selection, relevant symbols appear as tags.

Sources: www.garethhinds.com/ ♦

YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE REVIEW

'The Serpent King': Social Misfits Bond Together

By Sue Stolp



Well, first off, there's three Dillard Earlys. There's Dillard Serpent King. There's Dillard Preacherman, son of the Serpent King. And then there's the one you're friends with, son of the Preacherman (pp. 68-69).

Jeff Zentner's debut novel, *The Serpent King*, chronicles the lives of three teens in small town Forrestville, Tennessee, during their senior year in high school.

Loyal friends, yet social misfits, Dill, Lydia, and Travis support one another as they attempt to navigate the changes that will come with graduation. While Lydia has the support of nurturing parents and moderate wealth, Dill and Travis both suffer from the manifestations of an absent father: Dill's is in prison, and Travis's emotionally and physically abusive.

Dill is the protagonist, and it is the story of his male predecessors that lends itself to the book's title. The reader learns early on of Dill's pastor father and his fall from grace that landed him in prison, and later on about his grandfather with the same name who generated a dark legacy that has worked its way down to Dill.

Dill and his mother try to survive despite their economic hardship and societal shame, but the impact of this dual blow both demoralizes and denigrates their existence.

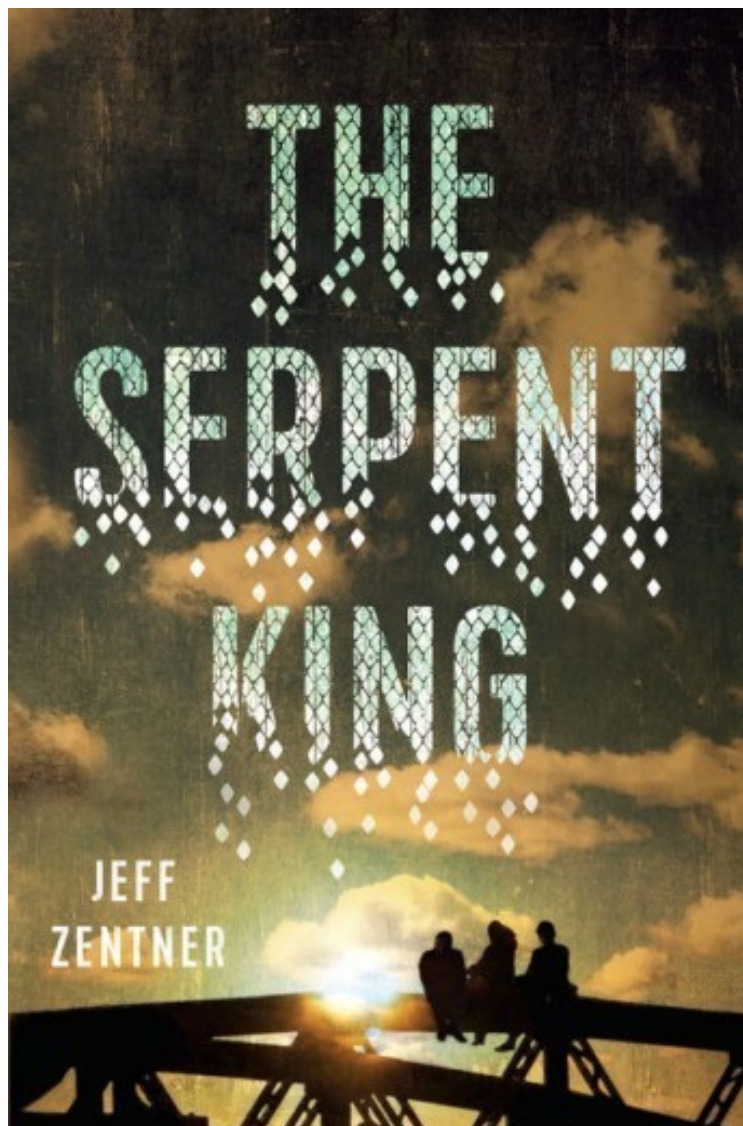
Travis faces his own indignity through his failure to live up to his father's expectations. He finds escape through an epic fantasy book series entitled *Bloodfall*, further alienating him from his family and sealing his fate as a high-school oddity.

Lydia, with her fashion blog and aspirations to live in New York City, is the bond that cements the three together, although she is an outcast in their high school as well.

“

A dark legacy has worked its way down to Dill (the protagonist).

”



A thread of creativity also weaves the three teens together: Dill is eventually revealed to be a talented singer-songwriter.

The narrative in *The Serpent King* is told in third-person alternating voices, odd numbered chapters designated Dill's while even-numbered chapters take turns between Lydia and Travis.

Elements of each character's identity are revealed through the narratives of the others in a way that feels inclusive of the three voices, and the polyphonic quality of the novel adds an element of complexity to this satisfying coming-of-age tale.

The Serpent King is the 2017 winner of the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award for Young Adult Fiction, which is sponsored by ALAN, the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and which recognizes and honors books that demonstrate a positive approach to life, widespread teen appeal, and literary merit.

The novel also is the winner of the William C. Morris Award which recognizes first-time authors writing for teens. ♦



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**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

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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.