

Reading in the Middle

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Middle School Students as Literacy Leaders

The focus of this issue of *Reading in the Middle* is on students as literacy leaders.

Anne Katz's feature article focuses on the "Teens for Literacy", which program provides a platform for middle school students to motivate their peers and their communities about the importance and value of literacy. The students expand their understanding of literacy and delve into projects to broaden their peers literacy skills. The article provides valuable insights for educators who work with middle school students to improve their literacy skills.

Our columnist have

provided us with insightful and important information on novels for middle grades readers, on how technology can support the Common Core Standards, and on helping us to understand the nature of Disciplinary Literacy.

Vicky Zygouris-Coe explains how disciplinary literacy is different from content area literacy. She presents key examples of what teachers and students need in a disciplinary literacy classroom.

Lourdes Smith highlights the importance of integrating technology in the Common Core classroom. In this article she shares how iPad

applications can support students throughout the writing process. The technology helps to build students literacy skills so that they can become literacy leaders.

Melanie Koss' booklist helps teachers create lifelong readers by building on the novels that kids have previously read and enjoyed. She gives us ideas for students who loved *The Hunger Games*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and *Divergent*.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of *Reading in the Middle*.

The purpose of this group is to provide a network for middle level teachers to share information, ideas, activities, strategies, and techniques, to disseminate pertinent information and research on middle school reading, serve as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints on middle school reading, and promote an interest in further research in the field of middle level reading.



Eye on Disciplinary Literacy

Column by Vicky Zygouris-Coe, Ph.D., University of Central Florida

We know that disciplinary literacy refers to literacy that is specific to each discipline. It is reflective of each discipline's structure, texts, discourse, ways of inquiring, speaking and writing, and habits of mind (Zygouris-Coe, 2012). For many educators, disciplinary literacy is "reading in the content areas" redesigned. Well, disciplinary literacy is not "new wine in old skins"; it is a different learning framework that calls for shifts in teaching and learning in grades 6-12 (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

Lessons Learned and Lessons to Be Learned

Four years ago or so, the term 'disciplinary literacy' although it was present in the literacy field, was absent from the vocabulary and practices of many teachers, administrators, and literacy coaches. Nowadays, based on my experiences with various schools in my state, the awareness level of many educators seem to be higher—at least they are starting to talk about it. Although their definitions may vary, the fact that disciplinary literacy instruction in grades 6-12 is a shift that is brought about by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the term is in their "radar."

For the past two years I have been involved in a district-wide literacy effort on disciplinary literacy. I visit secondary schools, and I work with instructional literacy coaches, teachers, and assistant principals (instructional leaders over different content areas). I have learned many lessons, one of them being that we cannot just talk about disciplinary literacy; we have to model, collaborate, provide time for disciplinary conversations and instructional planning, and support these instructional and cultural shifts that are part of this learning framework. We also need to align disciplinary literacy with national, school district, and school-wide literacy plans and core initiatives. Disciplinary literacy can-

not be presented as a set of strategies, or a curriculum; it is a learning framework that if understood and implemented well, it will "free" and empower the content area teacher to teach what he or she is passionate about.

The disciplinary literacy-learning framework presents teaching and learning in grades 6-12 as an apprenticeship (McConachie & Petrosky, 2010). For the purpose of this column, I will briefly discuss the concept of apprenticeship in content area classrooms. Have you thought about that lately? What does apprenticeship mean to you? What does it look like in different classrooms? In an apprenticeship-learning model, the teacher would teach, model, integrate, and mentor the teaching of content, skills, and dispositions to his or her students. Apprenticeship is also reflected in the CCSS. Under this learning lens, if teachers are mentors and facilitators of the learning process and students are mentees, *what should teachers and students be doing in each content area?*

Here are some answers to the above questions:

- Teachers create positive, safe, motivating, engaging, rigorous, and collaborative learning environments.
- Teachers hold high expectations for all students.
- Teachers provide scaffolded support and differentiated supports to all students.
- Teachers plan, orchestrate, and monitor learning in the classroom.
- Rigor and discipline-specific inquiry is reflected in teachers' lesson plans.
- Teachers implement a Gradual Release of Responsibility instructional model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).
- Teachers facilitate student learning instead of asking all of the questions and providing the answers for students.
- Students are expected to be accountable for their own learning.
- Teachers model and expect all students to use accountable talk that promotes con-

tent knowledge, student engagement, and inquiry.

- There is less teacher talk and more student talk in the classroom.
- There is reading, writing, close reading of discipline-specific texts, discussion, and habits of mind that are modeled, practiced, and promoted on an ongoing basis.
- Teachers create learning activities that motivate students to learn more about the subject matter.

So, if students are to develop discipline-specific content and literacy knowledge, skills, and processes in your classroom, what should your role be in the learning processes? I spend far too much time in classrooms where teachers do all (or most of) the talking and students are doing much passive listening and copying down information off of the board.

For example, if we wish for our students to learn history and think, read, question, write, and talk like historians do, they will need many opportunities to grapple with historical texts, ideas, and concepts. They will need to learn how to use sourcing, corroboration and contextualization, to read and analyze texts. They will also need time to discuss, collect evidence from texts, evaluate each other's evidence, and argue about what they are reading and learning. History is not a set of facts and events to be memorized; instead, it is the study of argumentation. Are you teaching history as memorization or as argumentation? Are you giving your students opportunities to make connections across historical concepts or are you providing the answers for them? We need to move from the "sit and get" teaching approach to "create and learn."

A disciplinary literacy framework requires a learning environment that is "built" on respect, high expectations, relevance, rigor, inquiry, and collaboration. Adopting a disciplinary literacy framework will help not only students read and comprehend texts and develop knowledge, but it will also equip them with advanced critical reading, thinking, speaking, listening, and writing skills that will enable them to continue to learn beyond the four walls of each classroom.

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The Teens for Literacy Project: Middle School Students Inspiring their Peers and Communities about the Value of Literacy

Anne Katz, Ph.D., Armstrong Atlantic State University

Introduction

The “Teens for Literacy” program showcases and celebrates the achievements of the middle school student leadership team at East Broad Street School in Savannah, Georgia. This program provides a platform for students to motivate their peers and their communities regarding the importance and value of literacy. The program also encourages students to consider postsecondary education and their future careers. Dr. Allen Berger founded the program in 1989 at Miami University (Ohio) to help inner-city school children improve their reading and writing skills (Berger & Shafran, 2000). He also introduced “Teens for Literacy” at Armstrong Atlantic State University in 2011. Today, Armstrong Atlantic State University sponsors the program in the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System in downtown Savannah. The university collaborates with a designated school liaison at the partnering school to facilitate the program, and a student leadership team of seven -to -twelve students generates ideas for promoting literacy to their peers and communities. The university team works with the students to apply their ideas.

Literature Review

Motivation is considered to be a key element of success in education (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). In addition, reading skills, in particular, are critical to students’ success in school and are necessary to succeed in society.

Research has documented that difficulties in learning to read affect students’ engagement, motivation, and connections to school (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In their motivation-engagement model of reading development, Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) set forth contextual variables that influence motivation and engagement among students. These variables include teacher behavior and support (autonomy, praise, and involvement), instruction, coherence and connection to students’ interests and experiences, text choice, student collaboration, evaluation practices, and goals. Teaching practices and context affect motivation to read among elementary school students (Gambrell, 1996) and the motivation and engagement of students in secondary schools (National Research Council and the National Institute of Medicine, 2004). This mindset extends to providing students with numerous opportunities for writing throughout the day. Fisher and Frey (2013) note that “writing cannot be limited to the literacy block if students are to succeed” (p. 96).

Motivation strengthens students’ potential for greater literacy achievement. Reschly (2010) discussed how reading interventions are a critical strategy to prevent students from dropping out of school and help them to achieve academic success. Data indicate that intensive early reading interventions positively influence students’ reading skills and lead to lower rates of grade reten-

tion, reduced numbers of placement in special education, and higher rates of school completion. Difficulties with reading have been shown to interfere with students’ motivation and engagement at school and with overall learning.

Brainstorming Sessions

Our sessions began with a “literacy enrichment minute” to gather student ideas on a topic. The students generated ideas about why literacy is so important in their daily lives. I asked the students to brainstorm answers to the following question: “What is literacy?” the figure (see graphic organizer below) displays the students’ responses recorded as they exchanged ideas. Students felt that literacy was important “to get a good job...for everyday life...learning something new...to understand the world around us...for social studies, math, spelling/language, test taking, reading, writing, to (know) how to follow directions/vocabulary...how to follow sports players...” In addition, the students noted, “reading is major part of college” and “If you cannot read, you might be cheated/not understand a contract.” The students clearly articulated important reasons for reading and writing.

I next posed the following question to students for discussion: “How can we excite our classmates about reading and writing?”. Students had a range of exciting ideas that I recorded, including “pep rallies, drama club/plays, school newspapers, book fair, news report, t-shirts, visual on-line books, draw about story/visualize, poetry, and

create a story/act it out,” among other ideas. The “Teens for Literacy” students were ready to excite their peers about the options and possibilities that a literacy-rich life presents.

School Newspaper Project



The students decided that the school newspaper project was one that they wanted to undertake. We began with a warm-up activity to discuss the format of newspaper articles. Buzz-words to generate student discussion for writing an introduction to a newspaper article were the following: “strong lead” and guiding question. The plan was to discuss how newspaper articles inform an audience and examine components of an article. We began by brainstorming newspaper titles and decided upon “The East Broad Times.” The next step was to brainstorm newspaper article topics on a large sheet of chart paper. Ideas included the following: an advice column, articles about school events, horoscopes, teacher interviews, book and movie reviews, study tips, events in the community, and more.

The first newspaper edition contained articles on a range of student-generated topics. Article topics focused on the importance of completing reading logs to earn a “dress up” pass (a day when school uniforms would not be required), school basketball tryouts, the importance of giving during the holiday season, studying tips, an advice column, and a holiday-themed crossword puzzle. The students presented the newspaper to peers in their grades, as well as throughout the school. There are 650 students in this urban school setting extending from Kindergarten through eighth grade. The eleven “Teens for Literacy” student leaders (five males and six females from across grades six, seven, and eight) encouraged their peers to support the project.

The second newspaper edition included an interview conducted with the school librarian, an announcement of the school’s spelling bee winners, a description of the group’s members and mission, and poetry. In addition, the newspaper included an article about a popular

young adult author (Jeff Kinney, author of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series) who visited the local book festival, another advice column, and a request for students across the school to submit poems/ drawings with a reading and writing theme for the next newspaper edition. The “Teens for Literacy” student leaders proudly presented the newspaper (printed in color) to their peers. A copy of the newspaper was placed in the mailbox of each faculty and staff member at the school.

Literacy-Related Play Vignettes



Another “Teens for Literacy” project was the writing and drafting of literacy-related play vignettes to present to their classmates. The “Teens for Literacy” student leaders decided that short plays would be a valuable tool to showcase the importance of literacy in our everyday lives for their peers. The plan was to display how a play can be a creative way to express oneself. The students’ play vignettes focused on a variety of ways by which literacy informed their lives on a daily basis. I provided the students with a Reader’s Theater script about the components of a play (setting, dialogue, stage directions, and costumes) to activate their background knowledge on the genre.

One student wrote about helping his Grandma make her homemade gumbo from scratch while reading her special recipe. Another student wrote about making a delicious ice cream soda following a recipe in a cookbook. Two students planned to present their “top ten reasons to read.” Three students wrote about creative study tips to help prepare for an exam. Two other students wrote about reading Eric Carle books to a younger sibling and about his style of illustrating books. Another two students wrote about reading the newspaper to find out the results of a basketball game. These literacy play vignettes were both authentic and empowering as the students

wrote scripts to exemplify the importance of literacy for their peers.



The students' "top ten reasons for reading" vignette was presented as follows:

- 1: Reading is used for other school subjects like Social Studies and Math.
- 2: Reading is used in your everyday life.
- 3: Reading helps you learn new things.
- 4: Reading is used to understand the world around us.
- 5: Reading can improve your spelling and language skills.
- 6: If you cannot read, you may be cheated out of something, and you might not be able to understand an important contract.
- 7: Reading helps a person follow directions.
- 8: Reading is a major part of college.
- 9: Reading is also a major part of getting a good job.
- 10: To be able to write well, you also need to be able to read.

Another sample student play excerpt is as follows:

D'ante: Hey, Grandma. Let's make some Gumbo for dinner.

Grandma: Ok, we can make it together.

D'ante: I'll give you the ingredients and you can cook it. I sometimes read the recipe so I can learn how to make it too.

Grandma: I know all of the ingredients by heart, so I'll tell you what I need and then you can hand me the ingredients. First, I need the soup.

D'ante: Here you go, Grandma. What do you need next?

Grandma: I will need corn, potatoes, tomatoes, seafood flavoring, and green beans.

(D'ante hands Grandma all of the ingredients she asked for.)

D'ante: After we put all of those ingredients in, what do we do next?

Grandma: We are going to let the gumbo cook for 30 minutes and then we will fix the plates for dinner.

(Once the Gumbo was done and dinner was served, everyone sat at the table and ate.)

D'ante: This Gumbo tastes so good; I feel like I'm in heaven!

Another group of students' script read as follows:

Narrator: Today we will be telling a story of three kids telling how they are studying.

Student 1: Hey, are you getting ready for the reading test?

Student 2: Yeah, I've been studying for that since the teacher told us about it.

Student 3: What study tips have you guys been using?

Student 1: I've been using flashcards to study.

Student 2: I've been looking over all of my notes that I took during class. What about you?

Student 3: Well, I've been testing myself.

Student 1: I've also been rereading the text and going over all of the bold words.

Student 2: Another really great way that I've been studying is to create songs or raps to help me remember big ideas.

Student 3: Wow, that sounds like fun. My teacher also told me that having a quiet spot to study at without any distractions and making a study schedule are also great ways to study. She also said that taking good notes during class is also a key part to good studying.

The students rehearsed their plays and presented it to the entire school during an assembly. In addition, a local company kindly donated t-shirts with a logo that they created to represent the group (stars and books). The "Teens for Literacy" students presented t-shirts and reading certificates to the students in each grade level who have read the most Accelerated Reader books over the past month. In addition, the students encouraged their peers to support the cause and continue to read and write for meaningful purposes.

Concluding Thoughts

Pintrich (2003) believes that a need for more "use-inspired basic research" (p. 669) truly exists. A goal of this project was to move towards more practical applications of motivational and engagement theories, with a focus on how to improve students' reading motivation in educational environments. Reschly (2010) presents the concept of Matthew Effects to describe how the gap between good and poor readers widens over time and affects students' engagement and motivation to learn. As students develop skill and expertise in reading, they develop greater knowledge and their motivation increases. Motivation is the pivotal connection between frequent reading and reading achievement.

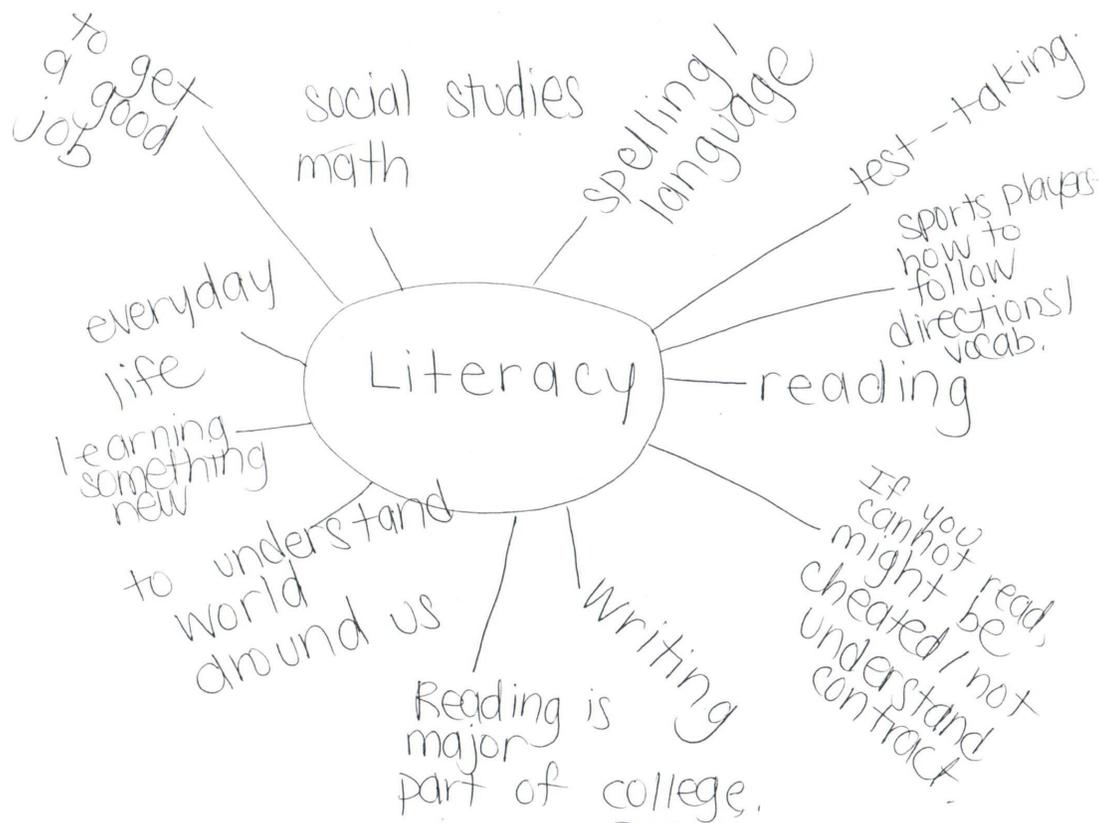
My suggestions for implementation of a "Teens for Literacy" program involve several components. In conjunction with the school principal, I recommend designating a teacher-liaison to support the "Teens for Literacy" program at the school along with university faculty. A Reading or Language Arts teacher or a school counselor is a good option for the teacher-liaison position. Enthusiasm, dedication, organization, creativity, and strong communication skills are key characteristics of the teacher liaison(s). Secondly, I advise setting a reasonable number of project goals at the beginning of the year. Ensuring that the project goals are student-generated will inspire classmates to become excited about the possibilities that reading and writing present. In addition, establishing a timetable for major projects and continuously evaluating progress will ensure achievement of the program goals. A "Shadowing Day" at the university at the conclusion of the program is a valuable means of celebrating the "Teens for Literacy" student leaders' hard work, and inspires them to pursue higher educational opportunities. Components of "Shadowing Day" may include a college campus tour, a visit to a university class, a library scavenger hunt, and a lunch where students interact with college students who are leaders on campus.

There are many potential benefits to implementing a "Teens for Literacy" program. The model allows for a great deal of freedom in terms of designing and implementing a range of activities to support literacy progress within the school. The "Teens for Literacy" framework positions student leaders to serve as the architects of program design as they generate excitement about reading and writing. As a result, the school community is inspired to reconsider the vital role that mastery of reading and writing play in their everyday lives.

Potential obstacles to implementation of the "Teens for Literacy" program include scheduling and organization. It is critical that university faculty meet with the school principal at the beginning of the year to establish a positive rapport and discuss goals as a team. The teacher-liaison must communicate the importance of the program to classroom teachers. Continuous dialogue between university faculty, the school principal, and the teacher-liaison is paramount to program success. In addition, one must not assume too many major projects per year. It is wiser to focus on fewer literacy initiatives that are meaningful

and thorough rather than implement many smaller initiatives.

I am hopeful that the “Teens for Literacy” program model will provide valuable insights for educators who work with middle school students to improve their literacy skills. The “Teens for Literacy” student leaders worked to generate and implement authentic and meaningful literacy endeavors for their peers. The teens in this program who worked to elevate literacy experiences for their colleagues definitely inspired others by their dedi-



cation and commitment to educate their school community regarding the significance and value of literacy.

At the end-of-year celebration, a “Teens for Literacy” participant in the program remarked, “I learned that I could do more than I ever thought I could do. I learned that I can be more than I thought I can be.” In an end-of-school post-program survey, another student noted “Teens for Literacy was an amazing opportunity for me, especially at the start of sixth grade, to teach others why reading is so important.” In their own words, this sample of student quotes from the “Teens for Literacy” student participants reflects a genuine enthusiasm for the program and its tenets. “Teens for Literacy” students’ Lexile levels increased over the course of the school year, as evidenced by scores obtained by the school’s media specialist. I am hopeful that students across the school were similarly motivated to achieve reading gains as a result of the model demonstrated by the “Teens for Literacy” student leaders.

The school counselor, who supported my role as faculty advisor for the Teens for Literacy program, stated at the end-of-year celebration that, “I am so glad that the university was reaching out to the community. More universities need to do this.” This sentiment affirms the importance of building a strong collaborative framework for the program. Most importantly, the significance of including projects that involved the school community as a whole, motivating students to continue to grow as readers and writers, is key to the program’s success and impact.

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Call for Manuscripts

The International Reading Association's Middle School Reading Special Interest Group seeks manuscripts for *Reading in the Middle* an independent peer-reviewed publication. The journal publishes two issues a year sharing original contributions on all facets of language arts learning, teaching, and research focusing on young adolescents. *Reading in the Middle* offers middle level educators a practical guide to best practices in middle schools.

Reading in the Middle disseminates pertinent information and research on middle school literacy, serves as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints, and promotes an interest in further research in the field of middle level literacy. Manuscripts focus on quality programs, promising classroom practice, middle level author viewpoints, book lists for the middle level student, and teaching resources.

Presenters at the annual conference as well as other recent professional development events are invited to submit articles based on their work.

The deadline for articles is February 15, with Spring publication scheduled for May/June.

***Reading in the Middle* follows specific submission guidelines. Articles should:**

- be approximately 3,500 words and, when appropriate, include photocopied (originals will be requested upon acceptance) samples of students' work, photographs of students working, charts, diagrams, or other visuals (work submitted by students may be of any length up to 3,500 words);
- offer specific classroom practices that are grounded in research;
- be double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point font;
- include 100-word abstract and bulleted list of key points;
- follow the current edition of the publication manual of the *American Psychological Association*—please do not include an abstract, footnotes, endnotes, or author identification within the body of the text.
- identify any excerpts from previously published sources; should their use require a reprint fee, the fee payment is the responsibility of the author.

To submit a manuscript:

- submit a copy of your manuscript for blind review as a Microsoft Word file to MSRSIG@gmail.com attach a separate cover letter that includes your name, affiliation, home and work addresses and telephone numbers, fax number, email address, and issue for which you are submitting. Your name should not appear anywhere in the text.

If You Like This, Try That...: Middle Grade Favorites
Column by: Melanie D. Koss, Ph.D., Northern Illinois University

We all love finding that book we don't want to put down; that series where we just can't wait for the next book to find out what happens next to our favorite characters. While your students are waiting for the latest installment, or have finished a favorite series, check out the titles below for some in-between reading material. Who knows, your students, or you, just might find a new favorite!

If You Like... Diary of a Wimpy Kid

Weiner, Ellis. (2012). *The Templeton Twins Have an Idea*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

The Templeton Twins are one of a kind. From the outside, they may appear to be your average set of twins dealing with a distant professor father and a recently departed mother, but look closer and you'll find a set of geniuses; geniuses with a problem and an idea. When two kidnapers set their sights on the twins in order to get back at their father, their dog, unusual hobbies, and their idea will help them save the day. Making the book unique is the voice of a sarcastic narrator who talks directly to the reader and provides a side-note commentary, leading

readers to feel like they have outside information. Pen-and-ink drawings and diagrams add to the story, providing images of intricate machines that go along with the twin's evolving plot. Coming soon: *Book 2 - The Templeton Twins Make a Scene* (2013).

Angleberger, Tom. (2010). *The Strange Case of Origami Yoda*. NY: Amulet Books.

Sixth-grader Dwight walks around school with Origami Yoda on his finger, a paper finger puppet that speaks and provides sage advice. But is Origami Yoda real? Where is the advice coming from if not Dwight himself? *The Strange Case of Origami Yoda* tells an interwoven story of Dwight and his friends in their search to solve the mystery of the puppet. Each chapter is told from a different character's point of view with different fonts and writing styles. Included within the pages are also sketches, character drawings, handwritten lists, and other assorted artifacts that help tell the story. And of course, instructions for making your own Origami Yoda are included at the end. This is the first in the Origami Yoda series. Other titles include: *Book 2 - Darth Paper Strikes Back* (2011), *Book 3 - The Secret of the Fortune Wookiee* (2012), *Book 4 - Art2-D2's Guide to Folding and Doodling* (2013), *Book 5 - Surprise Attack of Jabba*

the Puppet (2013).

Barshaw, Ruth McNally. (2007). *Ellie McDoodle: Have Pen, Will Travel*. NY: Bloomsbury.

Ellie McDougal, better known as Ellie McDoodle, has a problem. While her parents are out of town she is forced to go on a trip with her cousins, aunt, uncle, and baby brother. To make matters worse, she has to go camping. Outdoors! She comes prepared with her sketchpad to record every excruciating detail. The book reads as a compilation of Ellie's sketchpad and doodles, her journal, and her created wilderness survival guide. A large dose of humor rounds out this spot-on description of a middle school girl's summer vacation. Ellie's story continues in: *Book 2 - New Kid in School* (2008), *Book 3 - Best Friends Forever* (2010), *Book 4 - Most Valuable Player* (2012), *Book 5 - The Show Must Go On* (2013), *Book 6 - Coming in 2014*, a book about elections and tramping the campaign trail.

If You Like...The Hunger Games

Charonneau, Joelle. (2013). *The Testing*. NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

In the United Commonwealth, every 16-year-old is a candidate hoping to be selected for the Test-



ing, an exclusive opportunity to obtain a college education and potentially emerge as a community leader. Cia dreams of being selected for Testing, but no one from her colony has been chosen in years. What a shock when not one, but two, students are selected! When she finds out she was one, her father leaves her with a mysterious message to “trust no one.” Is this advice Cia follows as she leaves her home and begins to endure a grueling series of exercises designed to put her courage, strength, and intelligence to the test? We follow Cia as she connects with Thomas, her fellow colony's candidate, and together they attempt to navigate life or death situations in an attempt to be one of a select few to move on to Phase 2. The first of a trilogy, Cia's adventures continue in: *Book 2 – Independent Study* (2014) and *Book 3 – Graduation Day* (2014).

Price, Lissa (2012). *Starters*. NY: Random House.

Sixteen-year-old Callie is struggling to survive and provide for her younger brother after the Spore Wars, a war which killed everyone between the ages of 20 to 60. Alone and in a kill-or-be-killed society, Callie does everything she can to find food and shelter, a task made more difficult because she is a Starter and too young to legally work. Her only option is to register at Prime Destinations, an underground service in which Callie can sell her physical body to wealthy Enders who can scientifically borrow Callie's “shell” to go back and re-experience their youth. But when something in the brain implants and computer programs malfunction, and a nefarious plot comes to light, will Callie be able to survive and expose the illegal doings of the Prime Destinations company? Callie's journey continues in the conclusion to the series: *Book 2 – Enders* (2014).

How Does the Middle School Reading SIG Serve Its Members?

- This SIG provides its members with information regarding the teaching of literacy in grades 5-9. This group provides a forum for teachers, students, and researchers to share teaching ideas, book lists, and research applications.
- The SIG publishes a peer-reviewed newsletter twice a year with teaching ideas, book lists, and research applications
- The SIG presents an interactive professional development session as part of the Annual Convention of the International Reading Association.

Using the iPad to Build Middle Grades Writers and Achieve the Common Core Standards

By Lourdes Smith, University of Central Florida

Change is Good...You Go First

~Book Title by Mac Anderson and Tom Feltenstein

Changes are happening all around us each and every day in the area of literacy and learning. With change comes the possibility to try something different and generate a new opportunity in our own lives and in the lives of our students. For many of us it is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that represent the most recent changes in our teaching development and implementation. For others it may be the focus on the “new literacies”, those involving digital text and technology, that present us with a fresh focus for our instruction. Whatever the new change may be, it is important to recognize our role in the process and embrace it.

In *Writing Now*, a research brief produced by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the authors wrote that, in our changing world, “we write differently—often digitally—and we write more than in the past” (2008, p. 1). In order to help our students meet the needs of today's changing world, we need to consider all aspects of literacy and learning including writing skills and support mechanisms. Specific to middle school students, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010) have included a detailed focus on the needed literacy skills per their College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards included in the

CCSS. Students are expected to use technology for all areas of literacy including reading, writing, communicating, collaborating, listening, and interacting with not just other students, but online and offline texts.

Using mobile learning applications via tablets, iPads, Smartphones, and other hand-held devices are one way that teachers can use to integrate writing and technology together. While these are no longer considered “new” the applications (apps) that are being created can be both engaging and motivating or your middle school students. Check out the following apps focused on organizing, brainstorming, planning, and creating useful writing environment.

The following CCSS were considered when choosing the following applications.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2a](#) Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5](#)

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6](#)

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.6](#)

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

Brainstorming and Organizing

The Brainstormer (\$1.99) iPad

Brainstormer is an application designed to provide scenarios and prompts created by the spinning of a “wheel”. Plots, characters, worlds and plenty of other details. Writer's block begone as this app will spark your imagination.

Mindmodo (Free) Android, Ipad, MAC OSX and Microsoft Desktop

Mindmodo is a useful app for creating unique and personalized mind maps. It helps organizing ideas via brainstorming or sharing thoughts when you want to work with others via real time collaboration. You can work both online and offline and personalize your mind maps with photos or icons. Students can benefit from the visualization of notes via this application.

Index Card (\$4.99)

iPad

You may remember the days of jotting out your outline or organizing your ideas on index cards and then pinning them to a cork board for easy maneuverability and access. Now you and your students can use an index card app to do this and more! Write, create, edit, arrange, organize, share, flag, save, and collaborate with this useful application.

Whiteboard Apps (Cost Vary)

Android, iPad

Need a portable tool to create diagrams, schematic maps, or writing plans? Then a whiteboard application is a great place to start. Whiteboard apps like Whiteboard for Android and Whiteboard Pro: Collaborative Drawing for iPad are especially useful for students working in pairs or small groups with their tablets.

Writing Environment

Inkflow: Visual Notebook (Free)

Android, iPad

Are you a visual thinker and need an app for writing and taking notes? Inkflow offers you the ability to organize, write, and think through processes needed for good writing.

My Writing Spot (Cost Vary)

<http://www.mywritingspot.com>

Android, iPhone, iPad, Web Application

Looking for an uncluttered environment for working on your writing? The “My Writing Spot” application offers students a personalized area that they can write, organize, plan, and save their latest compositions and notes. Best of all, the simple interface is easy to use and understand.

Writing Fun!

ZENgarden (Cost Vary)

<http://www.zengardenapps.com>

iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Web Application

Do you or your students need a break from all your writing? Then ZENgarden may be just what you are looking for to relax, breathe, and think. Similar to a Zen rock garden, this peaceful place will energize you for the writing ahead.

Rory's Story Cubes (Cost Vary)

<http://www.storycubes.com/apps>

Android, iPad, iPhone

Looking for a fun way to develop a story before writing even begins? Roll the dice and consider Rory's Story Cubes as a way to generate ideas from a combination of 9 picture cubes. Great for any age level.

References

National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). Writing now: A policy research brief.

www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/PolicyResearch/WrtgResearchBrief.pdf

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). The common core state standards. Washington DC: Author.



Middle School Reading
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

OFFICIAL MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership for May 1, 2013 to April 30, 2014

MSR is a "Special Interest Group" of the International Reading Association (as revised May 2, 1973), and shall serve the same geographic area that the International Reading Association encompasses.

The purpose of MSR shall be:

To provide a network for middle level teachers to share information, ideas, activities, strategies, and techniques.

To disseminate pertinent information and research on middle school reading, serve as a forum for expressing varying viewpoints on middle school reading, and promote an interest in further research in the field of middle level reading.

3. To act as a resource body to aid middle school teachers in implementing or improving reading and study programs for their students.

4. To sponsor conferences, meetings, and publications planned to further the purposes of MSR and IRA.

____ YES, I wish to continue my membership or join MSR: **non-paying member (receive access to on-line resources)**

____ YES, I wish to continue my membership or join MSR, support the MSR-SIG, and contribute funds to support printing of the newsletter for IRA, further the mission, support graduate students, and support maintenance of the SIG: **enclosed is my check for MSRSIG for \$10.00.**

Send this form with your check to:

Billie Jo Dunaway

4640 Secret River Trail

Port Orange, FL 32129

E-mail Dr. Nance S. Wilson if you have any questions: nwilson@lourdes.edu

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