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Children's Literature & Reading SIG

Spring 2018

Member Announcements

Laura Cutler, a Ph.D. student at the University of Delaware, authored *Challenging the Familiar: Using Fractured Fairy Tales to Introduce Critical Literacy*. The article appeared in the May/June 2018 issue of *Literacy Today*, the membership magazine of the International Literacy Association.

The Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts Committee presented reviews of the thirty 2017 award-winning books at a session during the Tucson Festival of Books at the University of Arizona on March 10. **Pamela Jewett, Diana Porter**, Jane Bean-Folkes, Cynthia Alaniz, and Christine Draper shared reviews of the books, showing gorgeous illustrations and reading snippets of the lively and lovely text along the way. As well as a bibliography of the books and information about Children's Literature Assembly membership, thirty of the audience members were able to take home one of the award-winning books at the end of the presentation.

Anne Katz was granted tenure and received promotion to Associate Professor of Reading at Georgia Southern University in Savannah, Georgia. Congratulations to Anne on this career milestone!

Susan Knell has been appointed to serve on the Hans Christian Andersen Award committee for the United States Board on Books for Young People. She is also a new children's book reviewer for the *Literacy Daily* blog and published her first reviews on March 26th.

Renita Schmidt, Associate Professor at the University of Iowa, co-authored *What is Adapted in Youth Adaptations?: A Critical Comparative Content Analysis of Military Memoirs Repackaged as Young Adult Literature*. The article was published in the Spring 2018 issue of the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*.

Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, Ruth McKoy Lowery, and Paul Ricks are editors of the recently published book *Using Nonfiction for Civic Engagement in Classrooms: Critical Approaches* (Rowman and Littlefield). The following SIG members contributed chapters:

- *Critical Conversations: Approaches Some Authors Have Adopted to Address Social Issues* by **Vivian Yenika-Agbaw**
- *You Can Make a Difference: Young Civil Rights Activists* by **Terrell Young, Barbara Ward**, and **Deanna Day**
- *Advocating for Immigrant Experiences in Nonfiction Literature* by **Ruth McKoy Lowery**, **Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko**, and Cody Miller
- *Teaching for Social Justice: Nonfiction Texts and Multi-Genre Writing* by **Ann Berger-Knorr** and **Mary Napoli**
- *Sixth Grade's Inquiry into World War II Japanese Internment Camps* by Yoo Kyung Sung and **Junko Sakoi**
- *Creating Spaces for Critical Conversations on Issues of Social Justice* by **Mary Ellen Oslick**, Terri Robertson, and Melissa Parks

Member Spotlight: Deb Marciano

Deb L. Marciano, Ph.D. has earned tenure and promotion to full professor at Valdosta State University, Valdosta. Georgia. The department, within the Dewar College of Education and Human Services, recently changed names from Early Childhood and Special Education (ECSE), to the Department of Elementary Education (ELEM). Deb teaches at the undergraduate (BSED) and graduate levels (M.Ed. ECE) at VSU. She earned a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at The Pennsylvania State University, in the area of Literacy Education.

Deb will present *Children's Literature as a Means to Global Cultural Connections* at an international education conference in Italy this summer. The presentation recounts experiences in Italian classrooms during the 2015 summer Study Abroad program in Italy she created for VSU. Three peer-reviewed publications (see below) and two previous conference presentations (The Georgia Association of Teacher Educators State Affiliate of ATE, 2107, and the 62nd Annual Southeastern Regional Association of Teacher Educators Conference, 2015) have resulted from lessons taught in these Italian classrooms, by VSU teacher candidates, using *Where's Walrus?* by Steven Savage. This book was the ILA 2012 Children's Book Award winner for primary fiction.

The Pixel International Conference, "The Future of Education," will take place in Florence, Italy, in June 2018.

Marciano, D. L., Rackley, J. M., & Vaughn, G. L. (2017). Using an American wordless picturebook in Italian classrooms to inspire connections of people, places, and environment. *The Social Studies, 108*(6), 261-270.

Marciano, D. L. (2017). Opening eyes by opening classroom doors: Multicultural musings of study abroad in Italy. *Journal of Multicultural Affairs, 1*(2), Article 3. 21pp. http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/jma/vol1/iss2/3

Marciano, D. L. (2016). You-pow-pickto-pad: Speaking web 2.0 to a younger generation. *Ubiquity: The Journal of Literature, Literacy, and the Arts: Praxis, 3*(1), 42-74. http://ed-ubiquity.gsu.edu/wordpress/marciano-3-1/

Research Corner

By Jessica Edwards
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For this issue of our SIG newsletter, I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. **Vivian Yenika-Agbaw** and Dr. **Ruth Lowery** about their recently published book *Using Nonfiction for Civic Engagement in the Classroom: Critical Approaches*, also co-edited by Paul H. Ricks. This book is only one of a three-part series. The other two books from Dr. Yenika-Agbaw and Dr. Lowery are *Does Nonfiction Equate Truth?: Rethinking Disciplinary Boundaries through Critical Literacy* (released in March 2018) and *Exploring Nonfiction in Classrooms: Innovative Practices* (scheduled for publication in June 2018). All three books in this series can be used by teachers, librarians, and other interested stakeholders to enhance or supplement their discussion on nonfiction in the classroom.

Vivian: I am passionate about children's and adolescent literature, especially because of the endless possibilities that it affords children and adolescents. Dream it, and you will find it already covered in books for children and adolescents. These are some of the aspects of my profession that give me tremendous joy and that I consider worthy on my journey towards self-actualization:

1. Diverse literature is non-negotiable!!! It is a must in every classroom!
2. Children's voices must be acknowledged. It is futile to create literary texts that are directed towards them but consistently *dismiss* their authentic responses to these texts. So, we must take their book choices and responses seriously.
3. We must be mindful of the evidence that enables us to draw certain conclusions about particular texts, recognizing that there is no one way to negotiate meanings from/with

literature. It helps for child readers to be aware of this too.
4. One of my recent endeavors is what I refer to as "doing" literature and what this means. After being introduced to Design Thinking theories by one of my doctoral students, I have been researching various ways these can expand my understanding of how to "do" literature. Exciting, but I am still trying to figure this out. We'll see.
5. I support the idea of nurturing critical, empathetic and compassionate readers, but also hold writers accountable for the stories they tell about others. And so, I agree with Jacqueline Woodson that, "there is room in the world for all stories, and that everyone has one. My hope is that those who write about the tears and the laughter and the language in my grandmother's house have first sat down at the table with us and dipped the bread of their own experiences into our stew". https://www.hbook.com/1998/01/authors-illustrators/who-can-tell-my-story/#

Ruth: I have a strong passion for literature. I grew up a child whose nose was always stuck in a book. Today, my greatest pastime or hobby is reading. I read widely and deeply, focusing on authors I love dearly: Katherine Paterson, Jacqueline Woodson, Nikki Grimes, and Jason Reynolds, just to name a few. My list continues to grow as I discover and rediscover favorite authors like Linda Sue Park, Mitali Perkins and Janet Wong, whose works continue to challenge us to think outside our lived experiences and to experience the written words through Rudine Sims Bishop's advocacy of seeing the world through a window, mirror or door experience.

Regardless of the course I teach, I always integrate some genre of children's literature in my courses. I want preservice teachers to begin to see that children's literature can address any topic we can conceive. When students can pick up a "baby" book and realize that a topic about space, or the ocean, is beautifully presented in that "baby" book, it is a great way of sharing topics in a less threatening manner.

What inspired you to create this book?

Vivian: As a matter of fact, at the 2016 Children's Literature Association (ChLA) annual conference at Ohio State University, my doctoral advisee, Laura, and I were so inspired by the energy of the conference that we started chatting about what possible projects we could collaborate on. On returning to our campus, we brainstormed ideas on topics we were both passionate about, and that is when it dawned on us that nonfiction was one such topic. We also realized that it was an area that needed further exploration.

Ruth: Yes, based on conversations with Vivian, Laura and Paul, we recognized the need to have teacher accessible resources. These conversations resulted in three books on nonfiction literature.

Out of all possible genres, why did you choose to focus on nonfiction?

Vivian: Partly because of what it affords to the curriculum more so than fiction. Fiction is playful, distant, and safe; nonfiction is safe, intimate, but can be extremely dangerous at the same time since it may easily invite readers to let down their guard because everything in a nonfiction text might be perceived as "true" and not "false" as in fiction. Nonfiction covers so many topics and appears in a variety of formats, for different audiences and can serve as a strong base for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects. This is truly helpful, especially in this age of globalization where connections can no longer be ignored.

Ruth: We have had preservice teachers reach out to us after they become classroom teachers. Often, they ask for book lists about topics they want to cover in their curriculum. Nonfiction seems to be a genre of least familiarity for them and they often want us to send them lists of "good nonfiction" books.

The implementation of the Common Core, and the continuous reworking of curricula across the US, places a stronger emphasis on nonfiction literature, hence the need to delve into nonfiction. Working on this book, we tried to present materials in a manner where teachers not only read a chapter and identify great literature; they are able to get ideas on how to implement the books and teaching strategies in their curriculum.

Why did you decide to use literature for a critical approach to learning in the classroom?

Vivian: From my perspective as a reader, an educator, a mother, and a woman of color, I have come to embrace *critical consciousness* as a way of life. There are always gaps regardless of how eloquent the discourse is; there are always ideas and opinions in texts that make me pause. Gaps might be deliberate – a rhetorical strategy that keeps a us wondering, and seeking out more from other sources; might be unconscious due to the nature and or purpose of the research and efforts directed toward a particular project; or might be vicious with the intent to manipulate readers in a negative way or towards deficit thinking. So, I feel strongly that it is important to nurture readers to cultivate a healthy dose of skepticism towards any texts they encounter. We should mentor them to cultivate habits of questioning. In so doing, hopefully, they may become more engaged in their quests for answers on subjects of interests – while researching what might be historically and/or culturally accurate about a topic; what might be a scientific fact; what might be mathematically logical in nonfiction texts about that topic etc. Such quests may enable young readers to better hone their skills and perhaps begin to transform them from the consumer mindset often inculcated in *all of us* through mainstream socialization to other kinds of mindset, two in particular that I highly cherish and encouraged my children to cultivate include: becoming meaning negotiators and knowledge producers.

Ruth: Children's literature is my passion! My motto, "Just read!" encapsulates how I feel about books and reading. I believe that readers grow exponentially as they learn about the greater world in and outside their lived experiences. Children's literature is often the easiest way to share this knowledge with young readers. However, we sometimes forget how powerful the written word can be.

As children learn to read widely, they begin to connect the dots. They question and push for answers. They recognize fairness, bullying, poverty and so many other topics. They are sad when characters go through these various experiences and they will often share their unreserved feeling about what they think the "right" thing should be. Hence, children start being critical consumers of their world at a young age.

Was this recent publication date influenced at all by our current political and social status in the US?

Vivian: No! Nonfiction lends itself to all kinds of situations and discourses. That is the

beauty of this genre. Political regimes will always change; social status in the US fluctuates; nonfiction literature instead expands in exciting ways. We simply wanted to explore nonfiction in a deliberate manner and with new eyes. Remember, that for so many years (at least from my experience), we've encountered teacher candidates who would have liked to engage nonfiction actively and in a much more meaningful way but found most of the texts on their reading lists either uninspiring because of the writing styles or limited in the choice and scope of topics explored.

Ruth: So many current educational factors contribute to us working on this volume. I recently completed my term as a member of the Orbis Pictus Children's Book Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children. This award is given through the National Council of Teachers of English. Serving on this committee was a positive experience as we reviewed amazing nonfiction books and made decisions about the best nonfiction books for children published in a given year. Serving with other colleagues in this way also helped as we sought contributing authors for the book.

This book covers topics in the area of social justice, which can be a tough area for some classroom teachers. How does this book assist those teachers who struggle in this area?

Vivian: The book recognizes that the struggle is real, and so offers ideas on how some educators are handling these issues in their classrooms. For instance, just being inclusive in one's practice may start with the books that line your shelves. Ask yourself what topics/book formats, and writing styles are represented? What might that say about you? What is missing and why is that so? Or better yet, whose voices and experiences are missing from your reading list? Why might that be? We all know that book selection is often a political act whether we like to admit it or not, or whether we are thinking about this in a conscious manner or not. A few years back, I examined my practice and realized that for several years that I have been teaching children's literature at the undergraduate level, I have always privileged European fairy tales to open the course (it is easier and the tales are popular and meet teacher candidates where they were socially and culturally – "Snow White", "Little Red Riding Hood" etc. – although versions of these tales from Trina Schart Hyman and Beni Montresor often disrupted their neatly packaged idea of these stories from their multiple encounters with Disney versions) with the goal of taking them further – but how far am I willing to go?

Encountering decolonial theories years later, enabled me to rethink this strategy since teacher candidates are very smart and step up to the challenge when pushed. For instance, imagine the illuminating dialogue that may emerge just from their knowledge that there is a possibility of "Rhodopis and Her Gilded Sandals", a tale from Africa that predates Charles Perrault's "Cinderella" (See Yenika-Agbaw, 2018, "Decolonizing the Curriculum: African Fairy Tales and Literacies"). This would be awesome and get them to participate in healthy conversations that may generate opportunities for further inquiry about fairy tales across the globe and as such deconstructing the monopoly that German/French/Danish/Russian tales have occupied in the global curriculum all these years. So, in short, classroom materials matter; assignments that are mindful of our global diversity and literacies matter; experiences that accommodate children's ways of knowing and take their diverse skill sets and literacy backgrounds into consideration matter. The book offers all of these ideas without necessarily being prescriptive since we understand that settings vary and experiences and circumstances are also unique to that teaching moment, the learners, the

experiences and circumstances are also unique to that teaching moment, the learners, the educator facilitating the experiences, the space where all these come together to create magic, and the curricular demands of the school district.

Ruth: Something I think we were truly able to capture in this book was how open and inclusive we can be when we begin to talk about issues of social justice. We often focus on fiction but are afraid to look at nonfiction for fear of what we may encounter. However, nonfiction helps us to put things in perspective. We learn to walk in another person's shoes, reliving their experiences. We are able to determine that it is okay to understand the truth about others' experiences and grapple with issues for which we can have a true point of reference.

How did you select which specific cultures to highlight with their own chapters (Ex: Japanese internment camps, Native Americans, immigrants)?

Vivian: We were just fortunate to locate contributors who have ongoing research interests in these areas, and these added to the volume in tremendous ways. Thanks for noticing this!!!

What was your favorite part of your journey to publication with this particular book?

Vivian: Reading through the different submissions. I was quite fascinated by the breadth and scope of the project – how it turned out. All three (including Ruth Lowery and Paul Ricks) of us co-editors feel a sense of accomplishment, for we worked hard to find the right balance of manuscripts in terms of subject, research focus and writing style that is inviting – in order not to deter from our mission of creating a resource that we hope would serve the community well. We cannot thank the contributors enough for their commitment to this project. We hope educators will share our enthusiasm for the subject matter as well, and try to understand our vision, at least to some degree.

Ruth: It was beautiful to see how the authors approached their chapters from many different angles. However, the manuscript came together in a very cohesive way. Working with colleagues who share the same excitement and passion for nonfiction was also invigorating.

Dr. Vivian Yenika-Agbaw is a professor of children's literature and literacy in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at The Pennsylvania State University, where she teaches courses in both the residential and World Campus programs. Her research and scholarship centers on children's and young adult literature/texts and is informed by theories of critical multiculturalism, postcolonialism, and reader response.

Dr. Ruth Lowery is an associate chair and professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University, where she teaches courses on children's literature and literacy education. Her research centers on students' responses to literature, the incorporation of multicultural literature for children and adolescents in schools' curricula, West Indian immigrant populations and their adjustment in American, Canadian, and British schools, and preparing pre-service teachers to teach diverse student populations.

Save the Date!

Let's kick off ILA 2018 with a SIG meet-up! Please join us for dinner at 7:00 PM on Friday, July 20th (Dutch treat). The location is to be determined. Please RSVP to danielle.hartsfield@ung.edu by July 1st if you plan to attend.

Presenting at ILA?

In the next issue of the newsletter, we will publish a list of SIG members who are presenting at the ILA 2018 conference in Austin. Please send the title, date/time, and location of your presentation to danielle.hartsfield@ung.edu by July 1st.

SIG Elections

We will soon have elections to fill several positions on the Board of Directors. The call for nominations will be sent by email. Please keep an eye on your inbox!