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Bright Ideas Participants Loved Keynote Speaker, Chris Crutcher!

Mary Anna Kruch
President-Elect, MCTE
Williamston, MI

On April 12, 2008, author and adolescent psychologist, Chris Crutcher joined over 400 participants at the annual *Bright Ideas* conference, themed “The Place of Story in a Time of Standardization” sponsored jointly by MCTE and the Michigan State University English Department. A prolific young adult author, Chris has written a number of hugely popular novels, including *Deadline*, *The Sledding Hill*, *Running Loose*, *Whale Talk*, *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*, *Ironman*, *Athletic Shorts*, and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (for more information, visit his Web site, <http://www.chriscrutcher.com/>). Before becoming a controversial writer, Chris was a primary and secondary teacher in Los Angeles and worked as a licensed child and family therapist. His books feature teens dealing with difficult problems of abuse, identity formation, prejudice, and disability. Because of the author’s earnest, authentic handling of difficult topics, Chris’s books have been banned as too mature for their age group, even though the American Library Association has named eight of his works “Best Books for Young Adults.”

For the opening discussion at Bright Ideas, Chris talked about the place of stories in a time of standardization and the intervention of teachers and texts in a time of high stakes testing, standardizing student growth, and state-mandated canons. To close the conference, Chris spoke of experiences and people that have influenced his stories and creation of characters, and he read the first chapter of his latest novel, *Deadline*. He said that that he truly enjoyed the day in East Lansing with pre-service, K-12, and university educators, the brownbag lunch at which he

could mingle with folks, along with book signings, Q & A, and other informal conversations with participants. Wrapping up his final presentation, he thanked teachers who are out on “The Front,” placing books into the hands of youngsters, providing adolescents with the chance to connect with the stories he has created, while warding off censors. “There is no me without all of you,” he noted, “and so for all of you, I am grateful.” Chris Crutcher is looking forward to making a return to the area in the near future.

About the Author

Dr. Mary Anna Kruch (kruchma@aol.com), now a full-time writer, taught young adolescents for thirty years at Williamston, Michigan. Following retirement from classroom teaching and literacy coaching, she was Assistant Professor at Grand Valley State University, where she taught writing, children’s literature, and literacy methods classes. Currently, she is president of the MCTE and an active fellow in the Red Cedar Writing Project.

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