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From the MRA President's Desk

BY SUE ANN SHARMA

Education is in an era of rigor, relevance, and reform. Phrases such as Common Core State Standards, computerized adaptive testing, as well as teacher and administrator evaluations are daily reminders of this and will impact the landscape of literacy education as noted by Piercy (2011). However, two noteworthy constants remain on that changing landscape—teachers and the Michigan Definition of Reading. Talented teachers and teacher educators seek opportunities to be inspired, be knowledgeable, and be a leader. As witnessed once again at Michigan Reading Association's 56th annual conference, literacy professionals willingly share their experience and knowledge about practices that will improve literacy outcomes for students. And the Michigan Definition of Reading (1987) is as relevant today as it was when it was developed more than two decades ago. Reading is and will continue to be a constructive act, which involves the reader, text, and the context of the reading situation.

Reading, one of several communication processes that are essential for thinking, and learning is as enlightening for today's students as the gift of fire was to mankind. In Greek mythology, Zeus, the chief of the Greek gods, became angry with Prometheus for making people powerful by teaching them useful skills. To punish Prometheus, Zeus withheld fire from man. In response, Prometheus lit a torch from the sun and delivered fire to mankind. The gift of fire provided a way for people to keep warm, cook food, and make tools for themselves. The gift of reading is powerful. It provides people with inspiration for both pleasure and life success. It creates informed, knowledgeable life-long learners. Reading generates the leader in us so that we can fully participate in political and social processes.

Countless years ago, the communication process was first depicted on the walls of ancient cave paintings. The rich colors and drawings represent the genesis of using story to communicate ways of knowing and promote understanding of the world. Over time, oral communication was used to pass down tradition and thus the development of culture and human invention. However, knowledge and power remained in the control of a few.

This changed decisively in the 15th Century with the rise of the Gutenberg printing press, which greatly altered the literacy landscape of its time. This new technology made the written word available and easily accessible to the masses. People desired to communicate their beliefs and ideas. Printing also facilitated the dissemination of knowledge in standardized form and thus advanced science, technology and scholar-



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ship, leading to the founding of schools and colleges. The printing press initiated an information revolution, much like today's Internet revolution.

Today we are experiencing a new kind of revolution—an "electronic revolution." Digital literacies are supporting and enhancing social media connections with traditional print literacies. As 21st century learners, we need to be able to use our literacy knowledge to create new understandings. Literacy is, therefore, at the heart of the knowledge age of our time.

External factors, such as the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), marshal changes in expectations that will alter the appearance of today's literacy landscape. Learners will be expected to harness the knowledge, strategies, and motivation for complex learning.

As we move forward with the changing landscape of literacy, it is important to be mindful that teachers and the constructivist nature of reading are two constants that are critical for 21st century learners today, as ever. The outstanding presence of teachers, teacher educators, administrators, specialists, curriculum coordinators, para-educators, authors, and illustrators at this year's conference sent an important message: Michigan educators seek opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge and leadership pertaining to literacy. Michigan educators are eager to be inspired and gain new insights about literacy practices that will

best prepare our students for the demands of the 21st century.

Yours in literacy,

Sue

Sue Ann Sharma, President
Michigan Reading Association

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