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Using Hand Claps, Jump Rope Rhymes, and Marching Songs to Integrate Literacy and Mathematics

William P. Bintz

Sara D. Moore

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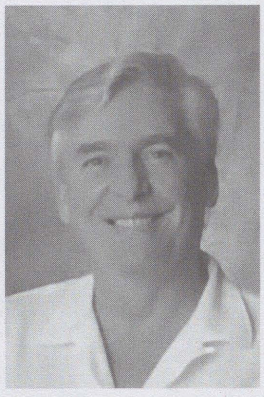
by William P. Bintz, Ph.D.
and Sara D. Moore, Ph.D.



William P. Bintz, Ph.D.

Sara D. Moore, Ph.D.

Recently, we attended a professional development workshop on instructional strategies to integrate literacy and mathematics. At the workshop we heard a math teacher, Vonda Stamm, sing a variation of the Duckworth Chant, also known as "Sound Off," to demonstrate how chants can be used as a strategy to teach mathematics. She wrote this variation and titled it "Zero."

Zero

Zero, zero, you're the best
You come first before the rest.

When I need to separate
Positives, negatives; you're the gate.

If I like the way I be
Adding you keeps my ID.

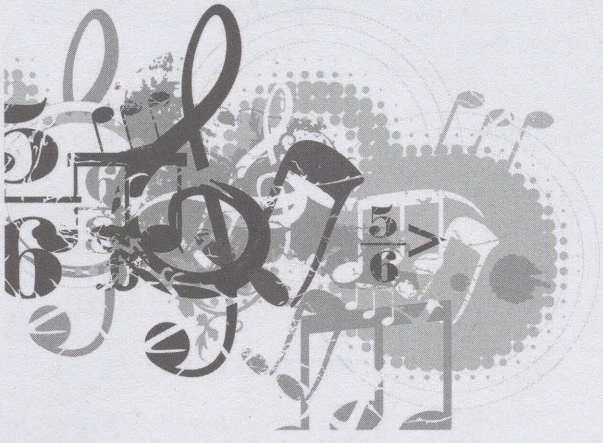
When I put you at the end
I can multiply by ten.

The only thing you cannot do
Divide into numbers; this is true.

If I let you hold a place
You save me from such disgrace.

When I think my song is through
I can multiply by you.

Sound off 4 3
Sound off 2 1
Bring it on down now
4 3 2 1 ZERO



We were so impressed with this chant. It creatively teaches important mathematical concepts like the placement of zero in relation to other numbers (*You come first before the rest.*); numbers on a number line (*Positives, negatives; you're the gate.*); zero is a special number because it has an additive identity (*Adding you keeps my ID.*); numbers can be multiplied (commutative property), but not divided, by zero (*The only thing you cannot do / Divide into numbers; this is true.*); and makes an assertion which can be tested (*When I put you at the end I can multiply by ten*), true only for whole numbers, not for decimals (Karp, Bush, & Dougherty, 2014). More generally, it is an innovative and engaging strategy to integrate literacy and mathematics.

This article builds on and extends this creative strategy. It shares an instructional lesson that used hand claps, jump rope rhymes, and marching songs as literary tools to teach mathematical concepts. We begin by highlighting professional literature that discusses the power and potential of integrating literacy and mathematics. Next, we describe an instructional lesson, and then share samples of student writing that resulted from the lesson. We end with lessons learned and implications from the experience.

Integrating Literacy and Mathematics

Much professional literature exists that provides powerful rationales and practical instructional strategies for integrating literacy and mathematics. In general, this body of literature converges on the notion that, "Literacy skills have become essential for understanding mathematics" (Cappelli, 2015, p. 7). It strongly suggests that good things happen when teachers integrate literature, especially picture books, in the mathematics classroom. Picture books contain stories that can demonstrate "what it means to wonder mathematically" (Whitin & Wilde, 1995, p. 23). They also can be a literary tool to spark interesting mathematical investigations (Whitin, 2008) and using them in that way, "often helps children to pose problems and leads them to conducting interesting investigations" (Whitin & Wilde, 1995, p. 25). Perhaps most interesting, picture books can "enhance and further explain concepts and skills being studied in math textbooks" (Olness, 2007, p. 3).

Carter (2009) states that, "Reading picture books with mathematical themes is an excellent way to engage students with mathematical topics" (p. 606). Halpern and Halpern (2006) describe literature as a tool to integrate language arts, art, history, and science skills into the study of mathematics (p. 229). Whitin and Whitin (2008) share instructional lessons that illustrate how reading and writing help students solve rigorous problems in the mathematics classroom. Similarly, Whitin and Wilde (1995) share instructional strategies that use literature to help students solve math problems and also enrich the mathematics curriculum.

Ultimately, using literature in the mathematics classroom is a good idea because it provides a human perspective on mathematics. It describes people putting mathematics to good use (Whitin & Wilde, 1995). The medium of story naturally carries the meaning of mathematical concepts and allows students to "let go of rules and algorithms that don't make sense to them, but they hold on to stories" (Whitin & Wilde, 1995, p. xi).

Instructional Lesson

The first author of this article (Bintz) is a teacher educator in literacy education. Specifically, he teaches graduate courses in reading theory and practice and reading in the content areas at a major university in Northeast Ohio. The second author (Moore) is a mathematics educator and former mathematics middle school teacher. Both authors have extensive experience integrating literacy and mathematics and collaborated on developing this instructional lesson. Bintz implemented the lesson in one of his graduate courses entitled "Reading Across the Content Areas." The lesson invited students in the course to use hand claps, jump rope rhymes, and marching songs as tools to integrate literacy and mathematics. The aim was to help students, all of whom were practicing teachers, mostly elementary teachers and two middle grades teachers, use literacy to teach mathematics more effectively, engagingly, and successfully. The lesson involved four stages (Note: Stages 1-2 were completed in-class during a 150-minute class session; stage 3 was completed outside-of-class over a one-week period of time; stage 4 was completed in-class during a 150-minute class session).

Stage 1: We, the authors, developed three text sets, one on marching songs (Figure 1), one on hand claps (Figure 2), and one on jump rope rhymes (Figure 3). A text set is a collection of texts that are interrelated in some way, for example, having a common topic, theme, or genre (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1995). Our purpose was to use these text sets to introduce and extend teachers' understanding of each genre.

Dunn, S., & Thurman, M. (1994). *Gimme a break, rattlesnake! Schoolyard chants and other nonsense.* Toronto, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
Ouren, T. (2003). *When Johnnie comes marching home.* Mankato, MN: Picture Window Books.
Owen, A. (2006). *The ants go marching.* Mankato, MN: Picture Window Books.
Peters, C. (2003). *Let's go team: Cheer, dance, march.* Philadelphia, PA: Mason Crest Publishers.

Figure 1. Marching songs text set.

Brown, M. (1993). *Hand rhymes.* New York, NY: Puffin.
Cauley, L.B. (1997). *Clap your hands.* New York, NY: Putnam.
Cole, J., & Calmenson, S. (1990). *Miss Mary Mack and other children's street rhymes.* New York, NY: HarperCollins.
Dunn, S., & Thurman, M. (1994). *Gimme a break rattlesnake!: Schoolyard chants and other nonsense.* Toronto, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.
Sierra, J. (2005). *Schoolyard rhymes: Kids' own rhymes for rope-skipping, hand clapping, ball bouncing, and just plain fun.* New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers.
Silberg, J., & Schiller, P. (2002). *The complete book of rhymes, songs, poems, fingerplays, and chants.* Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc.

Figure 2. Hand claps text set.

Boardman, B. (1993). *Red hot peppers: The skookum book of jump rope games, rhymes, and fancy footwork.* Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books.
Cole, J. (1989). *Anna Banana: 101 jump-rope rhymes.* New York, NY: Scholastic.
Dotlich, R.K. (2004). *Over in the pink house: New jump rope rhymes.* Honesdale, PA: Wordsong.
English, K. (2004). *Hot day on Abbott avenue.* New York, NY: Clarion Books.
Johnson, A. (1997) (Ed.). *Chinese jump rope.* Palo Alto, CA: Klutz.
Love, P. (2004). *Two feet up, two feet down.* New York, NY: Scholastic.
Rosales, M. (1991). *Double dutch and the voodoo shoes.* Chicago, IL: Children's Press.
Sierra, J. (2005). *Schoolyard rhymes: Kids own rhymes for rope skipping, hand clapping, ball bouncing, and just plain fun.* New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Figure 3. Jump rope rhymes text set.

Stage 2: A total of 15 graduate students enrolled in a Masters of Reading program participated in this lesson. We organized students into three groups and distributed a different text set to each group. We invited students to spend 20 minutes browsing each text set. We explained that browsing did not mean formally reading each text completely, but rather informally looking and leafing through each text in order to get an overall impression. Afterwards, each group passed their text set to another group. While browsing, teachers selected specific hand claps, jump rope rhymes, and marching songs that they found interesting and appealing, and created a "short list" for each genre. This list represented their preferences for specific hand claps, jump rope rhymes, or marching songs that they could use to write a variation to teach a specific mathematical concept.

Stage 3: We invited students to use the "short list" as a starting point to write and illustrate variations of selected marching songs, hand claps, and jump rope rhymes.

Stage 4: As a culminating experience, we invited teachers to share one variation with the whole class, as well as write and share reflections on the whole experience.

Samples of Writing

The following writing samples resulted from this instructional lesson. We selected these specific samples because they accurately represent the pattern of the original hand clap, jump rope rhyme, or marching song; present mathematical concepts clearly, accurately, and imaginatively; and reflect a writing style in which words flow fluently and easily. We also connect these samples to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association, 2010) for mathematics and present them in a particular progression. The samples progress from a marching song that teaches a skill and a strategy related to place value, to a hand clap that reinforces a skill and describes formulas related to circles, to a marching song that teaches a skill and promotes conceptual understanding related to Pythagorean's Theorem, and finally, to a hand clap that teaches a skill and invites differentiated instruction related to number sense.

Marching song. "Place Value" (Figure 4) was written by a student who was an upper elementary teacher. She wanted it to function as an alternative entry point for her own students to learn place value. Specifically, she wanted the marching song to teach a specific skill and a strategy for ordering and comparing decimals. It reflects the following Common Core State Standards for Mathematics: "Understand that the two digits of a two-digit number represent amounts of tens and ones" (CCSS.MATH.1.NBT.2); "Understand that the three digits of a three-digit number represent amounts of hundreds, tens, and ones" (CCSS.MATH.2.NBT.A.1); "Generalize place value understanding for multi-digit whole numbers" (CCSS.MATH.4.NBT.A); and, "Recognize that in a multi-digit number, a digit in one place represents 10 times as much as it represents in the place to its right and 1/10 of what it represents in the place to its left" (CCSS.MATH.5.NBT.A.1).

Place Value
I was sitting in my math class
Feeling totally bummed out
'Cause the decimals that greeted me
Had left me filled with doubt
How to put them all in order
I just couldn't figure out
Until my teacher said:

Ordering decimals is simple
When you're following this principle:
Compare by tacking on some zeros
Place value is the key!

Then the light, it dawned upon me
And relieved me of my woes
Decimal point, tenths, hundredths,
Thousandths, that is how it goes
So line 'em up and make 'em even
With some "Casper Zeros"
That's what my teacher said!

Ordering decimals is simple
When you're following this principle:
Compare by tacking on some zeros
Place value is the key!

So no longer will I wonder
Whether 3.72
Is greater than 3.8;
I know just what to do:
Simply add a Casper Zero—
Three-point-eight-oh, that's my clue,
It's clear which one is first!

Ordering decimals is simple
When you're following this principle:
Compare by tacking on some zeros
Place value is the key!

So it's not how many digits,
It's the place in which they fall
1.298, when compared
To 1.3, is small
If you doubt me, check the tenths place,
And you'll see that after all,
I've got these decimals down!

Ordering decimals is simple
When you're following this principle:
Compare by tacking on some zeros
Place value is the key!

Figure 4. Place Value sung to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

This marching song teaches important place value names: tenths, hundredths, and thousandths. It also teaches "Casper Zeros" as a strategy for ordering and comparing decimals. For example, two decimals in the song are 1.298 and 1.3. To compare these decimals, teachers can present them like this:

1.3
1.298

When presented like this, students sometimes mistakenly think 1.298 is a larger decimal than 1.3 because it literally looks larger and has more digits in it. "Casper Zeros" is a strategy that can help address this misconception. "Casper Zeros" takes its name from Casper the Ghost, a popular cartoon character. Like Casper, these zeros are ghosts. These zeros can be added to the

decimal 1.3, showing the same number of place value positions, and compared again to the decimal 1.298, like this:

1.300
1.298

When the decimals are presented and compared in this way, it focuses student attention on place value and helps them better understand that 1.3 is larger than 1.298.

Hand clap. "Round, Round Circle" was written by a teacher to introduce important vocabulary and formulas related to the concept of a circle (Figure 5). It reflects the following Common Core State Standard for Mathematics: "Know the formulas for the area and circumference of a circle and use them to solve problems" (CCSS.MATH.7.G.B.4).

Round, Round Circle
Round round baby, round like a rolling circle
Sweet, sweet circle, π times diameter,
(This is your circumference)
Shimmy Shimmy, Wow!
(This is your circumference)
Shimmy Shimmy, Wow!
Teacher, Teacher, what's the fuss?
Center to rim is the radius.
(Here's how to get diameter – ding dong)
(Here's how to get diameter – ding dong)
(Let's make a line from side to side – clap, clap)
(Be sure this line goes through the middle – clap, clap)
(Now get the area of it – stomp, stomp)
(Let's use Pi times radius squared – stomp, stomp)
Round round baby, round like a rolling circle
Put it all backward and what do you get?
Clap clap, stomp stomp, clap clap, ding dong!

Figure 5. Round, Round Circle sung and clapped to "Down Down Baby."

This hand clap teaches good vocabulary words and skills for recognizing important relationships between them, for example, "π times diameter is the circumference." It also invites opportunities to translate language in the hand clap into mathematical formulas. For example:

$\pi \times r^2 = a$ (read as, "π times radius squared equals area")
$\pi \times r \times r = c$ (read as, "π times radius times radius equals circumference")
$\pi \times d = c$ (read as, "π times diameter equals circumference")

This hand clap can also promote conceptual understanding about the distinctions between circumference and area, especially in terms of linear units and square units. The formula $\pi \times d = c$ (i.e., π times diameter equals circumference) involves linear units. The units stay at the first power, a linear measurement, because that is what circumference is. However, when measuring area, square—not linear—units are used (e.g., square inches, square feet, square miles). Unlike circumference, what is important to understand is that the units are squared. Stated differently, teachers can focus students' attention on these formulas in terms of units. They can help students better understand that, when we square a radius, we square its units. Therefore, the answer is in square units, which is area.

Marching song. "Pythagorean Theorem" (Figure 6) was written by a student who teaches middle school language arts and is interested in integrating literacy and mathematics. She wrote it to teach her own students the skill of recognizing and using the formula, and to reinforce the idea that the Pythagorean Theorem is more than simply A squared plus B squared equals C squared. This hand clap reflects the following Common Core Standard for Mathematics: "Understand and apply the Pythagorean Theorem" (CCSS.MATH.8.G.B).

Pythagorean Theorem
If your triangle, angle, angle
Has a right angle, angle, angle
Then you can use, use, use
Pythagorean's theorem, theorem, theorem.
First, you add three squares, squares, squares
To your triangle's sides, sides, sides.

Second, you will find, find, find
All three squares' areas, areas, areas.

The area of the biggest, biggest, biggest
Square is equal to, to, to.

The area of the smaller two squares, squares, squares
When added together, ether, ether.

Pythagoras states his fact, fact, fact
A squared, plus B squared equals C squared, squared, squared.

Figure 6. Pythagorean Theorem based on "Miss Mary Mack."

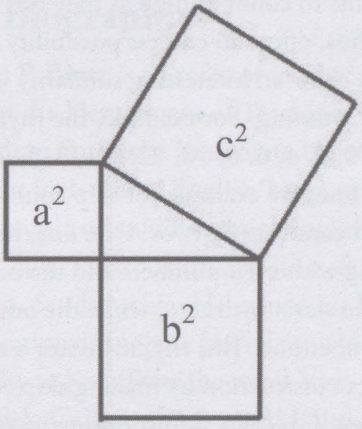


Figure 7. Visual representation of the Pythagorean Theorem.

This hand clap teaches an important skill about the Pythagorean Theorem, namely, it involves a fundamental formula, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ (Figure 7). It also can promote conceptual understanding by helping students see the Pythagorean Theorem as relevant in a real-world context. Dr. Bintz has a perfect example:

> Dr. Bintz bought a 12 x 16 storage shed to store lawn mowers, snow blowers, and an assortment of yard tools. He hired two independent contractors: one to first build a concrete foundation (the base) and the other to construct the shed on the base. After the foundation was set, the second contractor started to construct the shed, but soon noticed a problem. The foundation was not square; the angles were not 90 degrees, or stated differently, the sides were not perpendicular. This is an example of implications of the Pythagorean Theorem. Diagonals on a rectangle are congruent. The problem was this contractor did not build a rectangle; he built a parallelogram. Fortunately, the foundation was modified and became square. This extra work, however, was unnecessary. Keeping the Pythagorean Theorem in mind, the first contractor should have built the foundation in the shape of a rectangle in which the diagonals were congruent.

Hand Clap. "All About Numbers" (Figure 8) was written by a physical education teacher who wanted to integrate literacy, mathematics, and physical education. Specifically, he wanted to use this rhyme with second graders to help them develop number sense and counting skills. It reflects the following Common Core State Standards for Mathematics: "Count forward beginning from a given number within the known sequence" (CCSS.MATH.K.CC.A.2) and "Work with equal groups of objects to gain foundations for multiplication" (CCSS.MATH.2.OA.C.3).

All About Numbers
Numbers, numbers, in a row
How many evens can you go?
0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12…
Numbers, numbers, in a row
How many odds can you go?
1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13…
Numbers, numbers, in a row
Count by fives as you go.
5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35…
Numbers, numbers, in a row
Count by tens as you go.
10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70…

Figure 8. All About Numbers based on "Teddy Bear, Turn Around."

This jump rope rhyme highlights number sense, particularly even and odd numbers and skip counting. It

allows students to count as high as they can continue to jump and, thus, offers an endless possibility of answers. Teachers can show an interesting similarity and difference in skip counting. For example, the rhyme includes these lines, "0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12…/1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13…" Both lines are examples of skip counting and both are skip counting by twos. One line, however, is skip counting with even numbers and the other with odd. One line starts with zero, while the other starts with the number one. This rhyme invites teachers to differentiate instruction by making skip counting more complex. Typically, skip counting by twos, fives, and tens are easiest, for example, "5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35…," as in line nine of the hand clap. One way to differentiate is to skip count by fives and start with the number three, for example, "3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33…" Another way is to skip count by sevens and start with the number six, for example, "6, 13, 20, 27, 34, 41, 48…."

Lessons Learned

Students learned several lessons from this experience, and so did we. They learned the importance of problem-posing and problem-solving; purposeful, intentional, and meaningful inquiry; and personal reflection. In the process they became real authors. Specifically, they became real authors of their own curriculum, not recipients of others', by creating curricular resources that integrated literacy and mathematics and could be used in their own classrooms. These resources were personally meaningful and directly responsive to their students' needs. Most notably, by actively engaging in their own problem-posing, problem-solving, inquiry, and reflection, we believe they now are in an even better position to actively engage their own students in the same processes.

They also learned that authoring interdisciplinary curriculum involves a difficult balancing act. Throughout, students thought deeply and worked diligently, making sure they did not sacrifice good math content for the sake of a catchy song, hand clap, or jump rope rhyme. They were aware of the fact that writing an entertaining rhyme containing poor math content was just as unacceptable as writing a dull rhythm containing correct and accurate math. Students learned this balancing act and used it to guide their work. This lesson raises at least one important implication for teachers. It is important for teachers to consider alignment of the math in the rhyme to their grade-level standards. Specifically, they need to be careful of changing a word to fit the rhyme/rhythm (e.g., changing "square" to "rectangle") and inadvertently changing the accuracy of the mathematics. This is what made the lesson rigorous. It was challenging to create good content because students had to be concerned about content and rhyme/rhythm at the same time.

This balancing act also guided us. It helped us select samples of student work to include in this article. In fact, the main reason we included these specific samples was that the math was correct and accurate, and the rhythm and rhyme were consistent and catchy. Conversely, we did not include other samples because the rhythm and rhyme were good but the mathematics was not, and vice versa. We suggest that teachers use this same, or similar, selective lens when sharing writing samples from their students.

It is important to note that the lesson described here was not focused on all grades K-12. In large part, that is because the lesson was developed to reflect grade levels taught by teachers who often participate in this graduate course. Typically, this course is heavily populated by elementary school teachers, K-5; so, hand claps, jump rope rhymes, and marching songs were selected because we felt they were instructionally appropriate for these grade levels. Nevertheless, the rationale for this lesson is applicable for and adaptable to older students as well. For example, instead of hand claps, jump rope rhymes, and marching songs, other forms of writing could be used such as familiar poetry formats (e.g., haiku, acrostic, cinquain) and less familiar formats (e.g., renga, ghazal, ubi sunt). Likewise, instead of place value, number sense, and circles, students could use different poetry formats to demonstrate and illustrate their knowledge of complex mathematical concepts in algebra, geometry, and calculus, etcetera.

Final Thoughts

Teachers who participated in this project learned the power and potential of integrating literacy and mathematics, and the possibility of integrating literature in and across other content areas, as well. Specifically, they learned that active, thoughtful, and meaningful engagement in learning mathematics promotes confidence in and ability to successfully teach mathematics. In short, teachers experienced a change in disposition (or attitude) toward literacy and mathematics. Students learned that literacy is a powerful tool to teach across the curriculum. They also developed a more positive disposition toward mathematics and mathematics teaching. For example, one student stated in her reflection, "I've never really been good at math, but after this experience I feel that I can really use mathematics to solve problems." Based on our experience, teachers, both pre-service and in-service, all too often have negative dispositions toward mathematics. In this lesson, however, students found that integrating reading and writing with mathematics to be interesting, informative, and enjoyable. We hope this article will do the same for other teachers.

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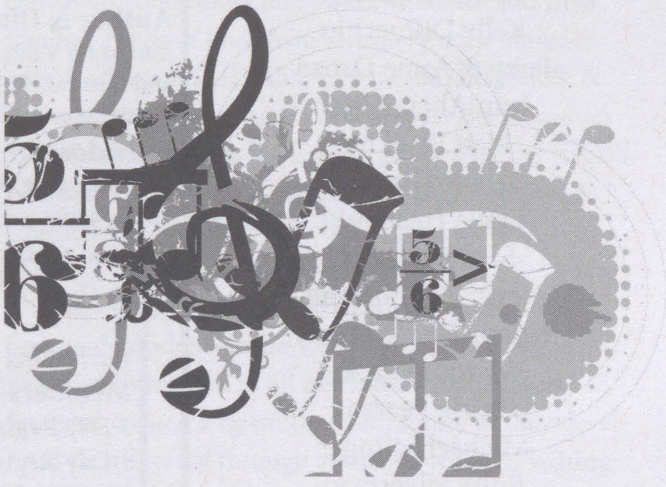
Author Biographies

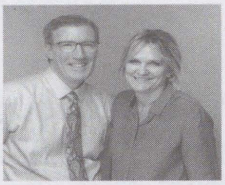
Dr. William P. Bintz is a Professor in Literacy Education in the Department of Teaching, Leadership, and Curriculum Studies at Kent State University. He has taught high school English/Language Arts in Chicago, Illinois, and middle school English/Language Arts in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico and Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. He earned his Ph.D. in reading education at Indiana University. Prior to joining the faculty at Kent State, he was a Visiting Lecturer at the Armidale College of Advanced Education in Armidale, Australia, as well as an assistant professor at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky, James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Kentucky. His personal experiences and professional interests include literacy across the curriculum, K-12, collaborative teacher research, interdisciplinary curriculum, and using award-winning literature as "Way-In" and "Stay-In" literature to create and sustain student interest in content area topics where no interest currently exists. He can be reached wpbintz@gmail.com.

Dr. Sarah D. Moore is math educator with ORIGO. She is a former middle school mathematics teacher and Assistant Professor in Middle Grades Education at The University of Kentucky in Lexington, Kentucky. She can be reached at sara@sdmlearning.com.



LITERACY disrupted

Start The Revolution



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Luncheon with Gary Schmidt - $35 - Saturday, March 9

Since American children's literature became truly American in the late 1930s, writers for young readers have struggled with the issue of writing about the hard stuff we encounter as children--and adults. How does a writer for young readers write about national and individual fears and calamities? Here is one writer's perception of our responsibility to tell the truth about a broken world-- a world that is so very, very broken, but also so worthy of winning.

VIP Reception - $15 - Saturday, March 9

Come enjoy a night of Music, friends, and honored MRA guests. Past Presidents of the Michigan Reading Association, and our 2019 award recipients, will be honored at this party, so you do not want to miss out! Don't miss out on your next professional opportunity and interesting connection. Register today! Immediately following the last General Session on Saturday.

Author & Illustrator Luncheon - $35 - Sunday, March 10

Join us for a fun luncheon and a chance to interact with your fellow educators, authors, and illustrators. Each attendee will receive a signed book from the author/illustrator at your chosen table.

Kaleidoscope Student Author Luncheon - $30 - Sunday, March 10

Celebrate with the best of Michigan's student authors & illustrators. John Schu, known for his expertise in children's literature, will be speaking to the student authors.

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MRA

It's _____turn to be the **SUPERHERO** of the week, on _____. This is a special week here at school. We will be celebrating your child, she/he will be teacher's helper and line leader.

Star of the week will be able to share a "show and tell" item with the class **everyday** of the week.

Monday: Bring in 5-10 pictures that will be placed on the classroom bulletin board. Pictures will not be ruined and returned the following Monday. Have student do the writing on the "My favorite" paper to share also.

Tuesday: Star brings in 3-5 jokes to share with the class. These can be their own jokes or taken from a book, popsicle stick, or Internet.

Wednesday: Star brings in their favorite poem or nursery rhyme to share with the class. This can be their own or a borrowed one.

Thursday: Star will write a short autobiography to share.

- My family members
- Where I was born
- My favorite memory

Friday: Star may bring a favorite book to share with the class. Please make sure it is a book your child can read easily to build confidence. This may be a story they write at home also. If you do not have a book at home they may pick from the classroom library.

Figure 1. Student-of-the-week parent letter.