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Teaching In/About Michigan: Resources for Teachers

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TEACHING IN/ABOUT MICHIGAN: RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

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Michigan is indeed a state to be celebrated. Reflecting on the brilliant changing of the seasons, we are reminded of our great northern beauty, the vastness of surrounding great lakes and the rich history Michigan has to offer. This resources column focuses on a variety of treasures that Michigan offers its educators. From celebrated authors and a wealth of historical museums to websites that enrich and inform, this state offers much to celebrate.

Finding Michigan's Authors

Michigan authors and illustrators are relatively easy to find via the Internet. Two websites in particular yield helpful information for those interested in learning about authors and planning school visitations.

Michigan Authors and Illustrators
<http://mel.lib.mi/miai/miai.html>

This site houses a database of authors and illustrators who were born in, live in, or have written about Michigan. It offers background information, publications, contact information, and individual author websites when available.

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators – Michigan
<http://kidsbooklink.org>

A source designed for writers and illustrators, this site also has something of interest to educators. It includes articles for writers, announcements of the organization's events in Michigan, and, best of all,

links to email and websites of individual authors where booking information can be accessed.

Capturing Early Adolescent Readers

Christopher Paul Curtis

<http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/curt.html>

(Editors note: please see the Dwight Blublaugh & students' interview of Christopher Paul Curtis on pages 9-17)

A native of Flint, Michigan, Christopher Paul Curtis is one of the most celebrated new authors of children's books. He has written two novels to date, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* and *Bud, Not Buddy*. Both have been highly acclaimed, and teachers throughout the country eagerly await his next release.

Fiction is not the only thing this author has to offer. In addition, he serves as an inspiring model for young writers. In talks for educators and students, Curtis tells his story of beginning to write while he worked on a factory line in Flint, Michigan, writing during his down time. With the encouragement of his wife, he finally decided to take a leap and write his first novel, *The Watsons Go To Birmingham*, set in Flint, Michigan in 1963. He can be heard at a variety of conferences around the country, and is also available for school visits. Plan to book him far in advance, as he is popular.

The Wastons Go To Birmingham, 1963
Intermediate Grades / Middle School

This is a novel that makes kids want to read. Kenny, the main character, is the middle child in a family of five living in Flint, Michigan in 1963. The book hooks the young reader right away in a hilarious account involving the older, "juvenile delinquent" brother, stuck by the lips to the family's car in the freezing cold. As the story progresses, the undertones become more serious as Curtis takes the reader on a

journey to the south which ends in Birmingham, Alabama during the church bombing that killed two little girls. *The Watsons Go To Birmingham* paints an honest historical picture of one family's experience with difficult times and prejudice in the 1960's.

Bud, Not Buddy

Intermediate / Middle School

Bud, not Buddy, as the main character prefers to be called, is a young boy barely tolerating an orphanage in Flint. In his small box of keepsakes left from his mother, a flier of a jazz band in Grand Rapids gives him a hint of whom and where his father might be. Bud travels across the state in search of his father, and we experience the world according to Bud, at times hilarious and at other times painfully accurate. This is another great catch for middle school students; even the most reluctant readers relate to Bud's plight.

Jonathan Rand

<http://www.americanchillers.com>

Michigan Chillers

American Chillers

Intermediate / Middle School

Rand is a Michigan native and the author of the increasingly popular series of *Michigan Chillers*. These well-written horror tales take place in a variety of familiar Michigan cities reflected in titles such as *Poltergeists of Petoskey*, *Gargoyles of Gaylord* and *Sinister Spiders of Saginaw*.

Young readers seeking an adventurous tale can connect with the familiar locations and often are inspired by this series to read more. On his website, Rand explains that he began the *American Chillers* series after students around the country requested stories about their own hometowns. The site offers biographical information, school visitation details as well as Rand's own journal of his travels, which includes accounts of school workshops across the state of Michigan.

Michigan History Comes Alive in Fiction

Kathy-Jo Wargin

The Wargin Company – Great Lakes Prints

<http://www.thewargincompany.com/biography.phtml>

Children's books grades PreK-5

This is a joint site for the photographer Ed Wargin and wife, Kathy-Jo Wargin, co-contributor of the popular children's book, *Legend of Sleeping Bear*. While the site is mainly a gallery of photographs published by this couple, it also contains some background and contact information of interest. The two celebrate Michigan's beauty and bounty in their art and writing.

Kathy-Jo Wargin is an author of and contributor to numerous children's books which highlight Michigan's treasures. Titles to her credit include: *The Legend of Sleeping Bear*, *The Legend of Mackinac Island*, *The Legend of the Loon*, *Lady's Slipper*, and *The Michigan Reader*.

Kim Delmar Cory

Intermediate / Grades 4-5

<http://maxpages.com/nahmypup/>

[Author classroom visits](#)

Two novels, *Charlie Boy* which takes place in Detroit and *Lily's Way* set in Muskegon, reflect the lives of young people in the late 1800's. Both are excellent resources for intermediate studies of Michigan History, bringing students into realistic accounts of kids their own age from another time. Information regarding school visits is available on Cory's website, which also includes teacher's guides for her novels.

Gloria Whelan

<http://gloriawhelan.com>

Intermediate / Grades 4-5

Gloria Whelan, a Michigan resident, has written numerous novels for intermediate readers involving

historical Michigan settings. Among her publications are a series of books which begin in 1812 when the British take over Mackinac Island. The series follows Mary, the main character, through three books. These titles, *Once on This Island*, *Return to the Island*, and *Farewell to the Island*, help make Michigan history relatable to students.

For Beginning Readers

Brenda Shannon Yee

<http://www.brendashannonyee.com/index.htm>
PreS-Gr2

Yee lives in Centerline, Michigan. Her early childhood book, *Sandcastle*, tells a tale of friendships and illustrates acceptance among multicultural schoolchildren who work together to create an elaborate sandcastle. *Hide and Seek*, her second book, is a rhymed version of this popular game played by a mouse and his housemistress. Yee's website includes both biographical information as well as her reflections as a writer. She is also available for school visitations.

Michigan History Resources

Michigan History Links

<http://leslie.k12.mi.us/~mwhfame/mihst.html>

Maintained by the Historical Society of Michigan, this site offers links to Michigan History organized in themes such as Civil War, Sports History, and Women's History.

Michigan Historical Museum Center

http://www.michigan.gov/hal/0,1607,7-160-17445_19273_,00.html

Offering online tours of several historical museums around the state, this site offers usable content as well as resources for planning possible field trips. The Michigan Historical Museum System link contains a map that marks and provides links to historical museums all over the state. In addition, this organization sponsors Read Michigan which is a yearly list of new books and other publications

relating to our state. Also, it features an events calendar for the upcoming Michigan Week, May 22-31, 2004. Register local events online and check out other happenings around the state.

Henry Ford Museum

<http://www.thehenryford.org/museum/default.asp>

Located in Dearborn, the Henry Ford Museum offers numerous schools across the state memorable field trips. A wide variety of venues including an Imax Theater which schedules educational films, the Henry Ford Museum itself, as well as the popular Greenfield Village that gives visitors a picturesque experience of visiting old-time Michigan in action, are housed together in Dearborn. The website itself includes an array of educational materials as well as information for planning events.

Michigan in Films

Michael Moore

<http://www.michaelmoore.com/>
Roger & Me, 1989 Rated R
Bowling for Columbine Rated R
Older Students

(Editor's Note: Robert Rozema's collaborative article on pages 66-68 presents ideas for integrating Michael Moore in high school English language arts)

Flint native Michael Moore addresses much about Michigan his work. His films notoriously expose provocative and sometimes horrifying issues that face our state and our nation. Among many documentaries and books to his credit are the better known are *Roger & Me* and *Bowling for Columbine*.

Roger & Me, 1989, details the impact of the GM plant shutdowns in Flint, Michigan. Moore gives the viewer a history of this once booming city and details its tragic decline as a direct result of the Buick plant closings resulting in thousands of unemployed residents. The film sardonically details

one failed attempt after another by Flint's city planners and government to revive the economy and provide for impoverished families. Moore's storyline revolves around his own failed attempts to get access to GM's CEO at the time, Roger Smith, to convince him to return to Flint for a visit to see firsthand the impact of his decision making. While it offers provocative insight into important ethical and economic issues, this film does contain violent images and language not suitable for some students. A follow up film, *Pets or Meat: A Return To Flint* (1992) depicts very little progress since the first film.

Bowling for Columbine centers on the tragic event of the horrific shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 by two of its students. Moore investigates the question, "What Makes the United States such a violent nation?" His investigation leads him to Charleton Heston, president of the NRA as well as into interviews with members of the Michigan Militia as he looks into our nation's obsession with violence and habit of perpetuating fear. Though provocative, relevant and vital, the film does contain violent images and mature language which require discretion in the classroom. Moore's website offers student and teacher's guides for classroom use.

Professional Development Resources

Michigan Department of Education

<http://www.michigan.gov/mde>

The state's official website offers many layers of information of interest to educators. Here, one can find the state's Curriculum and Standards Frameworks for all subject areas, updates and information about the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and other standardized tests, Legislative Educational Task Force Reports, Education Yes! Toolkits, as well as resources for parents.

National Writing Projects of Michigan (NWPM)

<http://writing.msu.edu/nwpm/>

The National Writing Project (NWP) is well-represented in the state of Michigan; NWP sites throughout Michigan offer teacher-support, invitational summer institutes, and various networking and professional development opportunities for teachers of all levels, K-university. The NWPM site is a central location for teachers to learn about NWP resources in their own community, with links to sites throughout the state.

Michigan Virtual University

<http://www.mivu.org/>

A highlight of the MVU site is that it offers free on-line tools and mini online courses for educators. This feature is part of the state's Teacher Technology Initiative, and includes a wide variety of topics relating to using technology.

In addition, the MVU sponsors the Michigan Virtual High School. The MVHS does not award diplomas through its institution, but rather provides online courses as an option for Michigan's students. School districts and students can take advantage of this resource to take courses not available at their local high school. Topics range from traditional courses to AP tutorials and courses and include many technology related areas.