Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Volume 17
Issue 1 *What's Cool in Your School*

Article 1

2001

Front Matter

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Recommended Citation

(2001) "Front Matter," *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1, Article 1.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1329>

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WHAT'S COOL IN YOUR SCHOOL

The Michigan Council of Teachers of English

Language Arts Journal of Michigan

Spring 2001

Volume 17 Number 1

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About Language Arts Journal of Michigan

The *Language Arts Journal of Michigan* is published twice a year (Fall and Spring) by the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, a nonprofit state affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English, and is a member of the NCTE Affiliate Information Exchange Agreement. The *LAMJ* publishes articles that discuss issues, theory, theory-based practice, and research in the teaching and learning of the language arts at all levels, kindergarten through college. It publishes articles, interviews, annotated bibliographies, reviews, essays, research, poetry, and classroom practices. The *LAMJ* invites teachers at all levels—elementary, secondary, college—to submit manuscripts for consideration. Articles from many perspectives on the themes are welcome.

Guidelines for Submitting Manuscripts. Manuscripts should be 4-12 pages in length, double-spaced, and use the new MLA style for parenthetical documentation and the NCTE Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language. Send one original and one copy. We request that manuscripts not have been published elsewhere. Manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. If the manuscript is accepted, a copy on a 3.5 disk will be requested (IBM PC or compatible, Microsoft Word 6.0). The deadline for the Fall 2001 issue is August 15, 2001. Manuscripts may also be submitted via e-mail to both editors as MS Word attachments. See the Call for Manuscripts near the end of this issue for further information.

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Subscription Information

©2001. Annual membership in the MCTE costs \$25 and includes subscriptions to *LAMJ* and *The Michigan English Teacher*, the Council newsletter. Send a check payable to MCTE to: MCTE, Box 1152, Rochester, MI 48603

Printing

Central Michigan University Printing Services, CMU, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Once children learn how to learn, nothing is going to narrow their minds. The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another.

— Marva Collins

So often in my meetings with colleagues, in my classrooms with pre-service teachers, and even in social nights out, I hear one teacher say to another, “What a great idea! Do you mind if I use it?” We are often inspired and reinvigorated by the ideas and creative activities that we learn from each other. When we chose “What’s Cool in Your School” as the theme of this issue, we hoped to hear about exciting, interesting, creative ideas being used in schools from elementary to college. Even as June has emptied our classrooms and set our minds free to contemplate new ideas, we hope this issue is one that will leave its readers eagerly anticipating September and a chance to fire up a new school year with a spark from one of our contributors.

The issue begins with a look at multigenre research as Jamie Hopkins describes a new idea for the research paper. Julia Reynolds also provides a new look at research writing as she describes her students’ project to write an informative booklet about their school.

Literature lessons can also benefit from creative teaching methods. John Ludy and Amanda Hill describe how Socratic seminars have transformed their classrooms. Annette Johnson writes about a creative program that she uses, the Independent Reading Unit. Giving her students more freedom of choice and responsibility for their learning has paid big dividends.

A “cool” addition to many classrooms in the past decade has been technology. Leah Zuidema describes a mind-boggling array of technology available to her in a classroom where she previously taught and then, clearly and helpfully, she guides her readers in ways to use minimal technology to achieve some of the same results that advanced technology can give them.

Many teachers and students find poetry to be “cool in their school,” so not surprisingly, this topic attracted several articles about poetry. June Nigg, Melissa Engels, and Charles Steltenkamp and Rebecca Baumann describe innovative methods for reading and writing poetry in the classroom.

An interesting combination of English and athletics inspired articles by Don Wilson and Bob Gassen. Wilson tells about a program in which high school athletes read to elementary school children and the benefits to both the giver and the receiver. Gassen also describes a gift as he pays tribute to a teacher/coach who inspired him over twenty-five years ago. He reminds us that often “what’s cool in the school” is an effective teacher, and that students never forget these special teachers.

While many might think that the least “cool” aspect of school is standardized testing, Mary Anna Kruch tells us how to slay “the MEAP monster” as she describes an effective classroom project that demonstrates that the best way to approach the MEAP and other such tests is to design quality curriculum that inspires and excites the students.

This month’s interview is a unique contribution from 4th graders in Dwight Blubaugh’s Eaton Rapids classroom who traveled north to Mancelona, Michigan to interview National Book Award winner Gloria Whelan about her prize-winning book, *Homeless Bird*, as well as her other writing. Their interview not only informs us about Whelan’s fascinating career but also models an excellent classroom experience.

Two book reviews close the issue. Each is a collaboration between a professor and her student. From Western Michigan University, Regina Nelson and her student Amy Triplett review Judith A. Schickedanz’s *Much More Than the ABCs: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing*. Patricia Bloem and her Grand Valley State University student Kari Scheidel review Richard Allington’s *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs*. These books introduce strong voices in the current debate about methods to work with K-8 readers.

The contributors to this issue provide inspiring reading for warm summer days so that as the next school year comes around, we can elicit that best of student evaluations, “This is cool!”

Jill VanAntwerp

Susan Steffel