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THE USE OF PLACE IN WRITING AND LITERATURE

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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 *LAJM* 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 *LAJM* 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 Spring 2001 issue is February 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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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The idea for this issue's focus on place in literature and writing surfaced during a conversation at the Coffee Talk Café in Harrisville, Michigan. My husband and I met Judith Guest and her sister Margery there to talk about hometowns and writing and summer and books. As we talked about Guest's most recent novel, *Errands*, which is set in Harrisville (as Garrison Keillor would say, "My hometown") we marveled at how each place has its own stories that must be told. Eventually I asked Guest if we could meet again to talk about place in an informal interview to be used in LAJM. When she agreed, the topic for this issue was set. Surrounding the interview with Guest are contributions that promote the use of place with our students, explore the meaning of place in literature, and celebrate the places in our lives.

M. P. Cavanaugh, while urging teachers to focus on "place" when designing lessons for their students' reading and writing, says, "We simply have not paid enough attention to it." She suggests several possible approaches. Caroline S. McKinney also discusses a focus on place while working with students. With the example of Audrey Coulombis's character Willa Jo sitting on the roof, McKinney begins a discussion on perspective that makes her point: "Weaving discussions of setting into teaching and literary analysis can be much richer when we consider the relationship between setting and gaining perspective." Dee Story also needed to gain a perspective in order to experience the places she had read about. Her account of her travels on the Oregon Trail brings history to life. She concludes, "After driving the approximate route of the Oregon Trail and taking an ample amount of photographs, I look at place or setting in a much different manner."

Looking at place in a much different manner is also the theme of Jason Kane's memoir "I Can Read." His "place" is school, and he begins, "I remember the Letter People." Through Kane's eyes we may remember once again that our classrooms are among the most significant places our students must deal with in their lives. Embedded in Kane's piece there is much food for thought.

Milford Jeremiah shows in his article that "authors regard place as a starting point for their work." While Jeremiah illustrates his point with examples and teaching suggestions, Ari Berk explores a similar theme from the perspective of an author. He has created a fictional culture and takes the reader on a journey as he explores the motifs of landscape, migration, identity, and artifice.

Hether Jonna describes her work with Nadia Wheatley's book *My Place*. Using the book as a guide, Jonna led her fifth graders through an exploration of their personal places. Her article shows how rich students' work can be when they write about the familiar and special places they inhabit. Dauvan Mulally experienced this herself as a writer and shares her memory of a special place in "A Superior Place to Be."

This issue closes with a resource article. Pam Gates-Duffield has explored the concept of place in children's and adolescent literature and has created an annotated bibliography grouped by cultural identities. Her lists supplement the ideas and information provided by our other contributors and are sure to inspire us in all of our roles—teachers, readers, and writers—to begin an exploration of place.

Jill VanAntwerp
Susan Steffel