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Professional Books of Interest

EDITED BY KRISTINE ALLEN

Dear Readers,

With the school year starting anew, we are all determined to engage our students in reading and writing and, as always, seeking new and meaningful ways to do so. The professional books reviewed in this issue offer new perspectives, gained from personal experience, on issues ranging from critical writing to *Making Nonfiction ... Come Alive*. Each author shares insights, activities, and strategies for engaging students at all levels, in all types of text.

Susan Hannant offers an administrator's perspective in her review of *Critical Literacy and Writer's Workshop: Bridging Purpose and Passion to Student Writing*. She discusses the extensive preparations needed to implement the methods promoted in the text.

In her review of *Happily Ever After: Sharing Folk Literature With Elementary and Middle School Students*, Sharman Siebenthal Adams invites us to expand our knowledge and use of folk literature to engage both male and female readers.

Are you stumped as to how to engage students in informational text? After reading Terrienne Harnden's review of *Making Nonfiction and Other Informational Texts Come Alive*, you will see this book as a must-have for your professional collection.

Moving from the general to the specific, I review *What a Character! Character Study as a Guide to Literary Meaning Making in Grades K-8*, an in-depth and innovative guide with contributions by authors such as Katherine Paterson and Kate DiCamillo.

Enjoy and learn!

Kristine

Kristine Allen
Guest Editor

Heffernan, L. (2004). *Critical Literacy and Writer's Workshop*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. ISBN 0-87207-541-9.

BY SUSAN HANNANT

Teachers in classrooms across the United States have embraced writer's workshop. People who are gifted in teaching the craft of writing, such as Lucy Calkins, Ralph Fletcher, and Barry Lane, have become models from whom to study and learn best practices, which teachers apply daily in classrooms. As a result, most students are quite fluent when it comes to writing about their adventures, interests, or passions in life but have more difficulty with informational and critical writing. Persuasive writing and research papers are perhaps the closest to critical writing that we, as educators, introduce to our students in writer's workshop. In *Critical Literacy and Writer's Workshop* the author takes us on a journey with a 20-year veteran teacher who takes a serious look at her writer's workshop model, critical issues, and student writing. Lee Heffernan makes this an easy read by carefully designing the chapters for an educator to follow her systematic plan of action in bringing critical writing to the classroom.

Observations in most classrooms find students engaged in meaningful dialogue, whether the conversation takes place in science, social studies, current events, or language arts. Students are able to form their opinions and draw correlations during these discussions. As an administrator I have observed this in many classrooms. Interestingly, however, these verbal opinions and correlations rarely flow into the students' writing. As Heffernan ventured beyond the college course in dealing

with critical issues and the writer's workshop, she desired to bring this meaningful conversation to print.

As a principal, I applaud the use of authentic literature to bring the discussion to life on a level at which students are able to apply it to their everyday lives. Heffernan carefully points out that, over the 3-year process of this research in her classroom, each group handled the issues differently. In following this format, teachers must make continuous assessments to monitor the success of the program. A teacher also needs to have command of the suggested text, the text's social issues, and the implications that might occur as these are used. Careful planning and the establishment of guidelines are essential. Students need guidance in holding such discussions, especially as they begin to apply some of these critical issues to their own personal lives. All of this, as well as taking the discussion to writing, should come from the teacher modeling.

Without time spent in careful planning and modeling, this process of critical discussion and writing could become a teacher's and administrator's worst nightmare. This book emphasizes that preparation, as well as student and parent acceptance of the issues brought to life, are the keys to success with student writing.

(Susan Hannant is principal of Clear Lake Elementary School in Oxford, Michigan.)

Young, T.A. (Ed.) (2004). *Happily Ever After: Sharing Folk Literature With Elementary and Middle School Students*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. ISBN: 0-87207-510-9 \$34.95.

BY SHARMAN SIEBENTHAL ADAMS

Whether you are an educator or a middle school graduate, the chances that you've read some type of folk literature are pretty good. That said, while many of us easily identify stories such as "The Three Little Pigs" or "Paul Bunyan" as falling into this category, these are only the start of an expansive genre of literature to which Terrell Young introduces his readers. Designed to meet the needs of elementary and middle school teachers and educators, *Happily Ever After* provides a wonderful resource not only for teachers in K-8, but also reading specialists and teacher educa-

tors. Compiling information from multiple authors, Young succeeds in developing a rich descriptive and well organized text from which educators at all levels can more fully explore the topic of folk literature.

Happily Ever After is divided into four sections, composed of 18 chapters written by different authors. Section 1 begins with an overview introducing the genre of folk literature; section 2 describes folk literature across five subgenres; section 3 provides an extensive sample of folk literature across seven cultural areas; and section 4 concludes the book by providing educa-

tors with activities for the classroom. The book's sections build upon one another, providing readers with a thorough background on subgenres, cultures, and potential activities to use with K-8 students. Across chapters, each of the authors does a tremendous job citing not only referenced work but recommended teaching resources. At minimum, readers will obtain an extensive reference guide to hundreds of resources, including novels, chapter books, short story collections, picture books, poetry books, scripts, audio tapes, CDs, and Web sites.

Section 1 introduces readers to an overview of folk literature. While only one chapter in length, it is a must read in terms of gaining an understanding of the depths of folk literature and will assist readers in approaching later chapters. Within this section, Young helps explain: "What is folk literature?" "What are its functions?" "What are the benefits of using folk literature in the classroom?" and "What does the study of folk literature include?" In answering these questions and transitioning into subsequent sections of the book, Young describes folk literature as encompassing fables, myths, legends, tall tales, and folk tales. By providing examples of various types of folk literature, Young begins to show readers the similarities in stories told across cultures and explains why some motifs are commonly found in folk literature. Throughout this section and the entire book, the authors emphasize the importance of using folk literature with students and provide resources for further exploring how to accomplish this task within schools. This chapter concludes with the first of many extensive reference lists that educators will use long after reading the descriptive content of this book.

Section 2 is divided into five chapters that go into detail describing the subgenres of folk literature. These chapters cover folk tales, fables, myths, legends, and tall tales. Within chapter two the author introduces readers to folk tales by describing *pourquoi*, trickster tales, fairy tales, transformation tales, noodlehead tales, and cumulative tales. Chapter 3 provides the historical background and importance of fables both in terms of original tales and tales retold. In chapter 4, the authors describe myths as the oldest stories and distinguish between myth and legend. In chapter 5 the author delves into the challenging area of what defines a legend and spends a significant amount of time providing detailed examples of legends from diverse cultures. Chapter 6 completes the first section of the book by introducing tall tales as

an American invention with possible historical ties to ancient civilizations. Across each of these five chapters, the authors' writing is strong while also being complementary to the content defined in colleagues' chapters. This is important in that the authors do an excellent job of introducing material in a manner that defines each chapter individually, but which respects other content and flows well from one topic to the next. At the end of each of these chapters, authors provide the reader with examples of class activities and references that can be used when working with students.

Section 3 of *Happily Ever After* builds upon cultural relevance that was introduced in the previous two sections. The authors in chapters 7 through 13 do an impressive job of describing seven different cultural groups—each of which are broken down to include further subcultures of folk literature. Chapter 7 begins by describing folk tales from the African Diaspora and the power of oral tradition. In chapter 8, the importance of Asian folk literature is introduced. Chapter 9 delves into the value of European folk tales. Jewish folk tales are explored in chapter 10. In chapter 11, the authors describe Latino cultural folk literature, making connections to multimedia classroom activities. Chapter 12 describes literature from Middle Eastern countries and the Indian Subcontinent. In concluding section 3, chapter 13 provides background on Native American tribal stories. Within each of these seven chapters, the authors describe literature from diverse cultures with respectful consideration by providing readers with important historical content related to such literature. These chapters intertwine subgenres of culture with the subgenres of folk literature described in previous chapters.

Section 4 concludes the book by providing readers with five individual chapters that highlight ways to incorporate folk literature into the classroom. In chapter 14, the authors describe using variants and versions of folk literature using the example of *Cinderella*. Chapter 15 explores ways in which folklore can be collected in the home, school, and community. In chapter 16, the author emphasizes the power of using drama to act out folk tales in the classroom. Chapter 17 explores the use of fairy tales to draw out and inspire young authors. Chapter 18 concludes this section by examining the use of three variants of the fairy tale *Rumpelstiltskin*.

Happily Ever After offers educators an excellent resource for better understanding the diverse elements that make up the genre of folk literature. Chapters are rich in description and provide numerous resources, including both historical descriptions and potential classroom activities. Terrell Young has brought together a wealth of strong writers who effectively engage and excite readers to further explore the

depths of folk literature. Of special note is the exceptional job former MRJ editor Linda Pavonetti does in Chapter 6 on Tall Tales. This chapter is a delight to read and introduces texts that appeal to both male and female students.

(Sharman Siebenthal Adams is an assistant professor of education at the University of Michigan-Flint.)

Pike, Kathy (2004) *Making Nonfiction and Other Informational Texts Come Alive*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc. 192pp. ISBN:0-205-36609-0; \$16.31.

BY TERRIANNE HARNDEN

Wow! Entering into the "world of nonfiction" is quite the journey the authors promised. And do they deliver! In *Making Nonfiction and other Informational Texts Come Alive*, Kathy Pike and Jean Mumper pack all the information you will need to feel confident and successful teaching nonfiction across the curriculum.

A quick glance through the text left me wondering how I would ever navigate successfully. It seemed unmanageable. There are changes in font, several uses of bold and italics, chapter features, visuals, and a nonfiction book list I kept finding myself comparing to my classroom library collection. But just as nonfiction readers employ strategies, gaining knowledge about the author's style, I reread, went back to the contents and preface and carefully examined the promised features in each chapter. Soon I gained a complete understanding about how the book works, and the ease in reading became apparent. Was this intentional?

Students need to understand the craft of nonfiction texts. They need to learn how to navigate and sort through the book. Referencing previous sections to help support comprehension is a basic reading skill some students haven't mastered. These and many other issues are unfolded for teachers to help them overcome the apprehensiveness sometimes associated with nonfiction reading and writing.

Pike and Mumper deliver a very informative book. It has eight chapters, each devoted to a single purpose, such as: reading nonfiction, writing nonfiction, strategies for success, graphic organizers, and showcasing learning. Each chapter has its own graphic organizer, plus a nonfiction trade book with an extension activity and a "Try This" activity.

The book begins with an overview on nonfiction. The authors describe what informational texts look like, define the features of nonfiction text, and give the purpose for that feature. They suggest how much information will become available in the near future and how teachers can prepare students for this. "Acquiring and using information are integral to performing effectively, not only in school, but also for succeeding at work and at home" (p. 9). Expository texts, in our world of technology, will be so easily accessible, students entering into our global economy must be able to locate, understand, and use information readily.

Chapter 2 gives a great deal of information regarding the types of nonfiction materials available to the classroom. I've never stopped to think about the sources surrounding us in our daily lives: advertisements, resumes, birth certificates, census reports, patents, legal and governmental documents, receipts. I appreciate the list of nonfiction authors and suggestions on how technology and guest speakers can be better utilized in the classroom to enhance our students' understanding of nonfiction in our daily lives. They also explain that children need to learn about the basic writing patterns authors use in expository text and give examples about how to inform students of these differences.

Chapter 3 contains a plethora of information on effective read alouds in the classroom and conducting successful literature circles and book clubs for expository texts. One of the most attractive chapters for teachers, however, is chapter 4. Pike and Mumper bring together information for teachers to use to ensure success with informational text. The typical K-W-L procedure, which I had rarely used in my classroom, is explained in more detail and presented

with variations and adjustments. I especially appreciate the section on reading for the gist. This is a more difficult accomplishment with nonfiction text. This chapter also addresses ideas for vocabulary development with offers several strategies.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the craft of writing nonfiction. Pike and Mumper give credit to the research of Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, Donald Murray, and Nancie Atwell for improving writing in elementary schools. "Teachers are now providing their students with more authentic writing experiences and helping them learn how to write for real reasons and real audiences" (Pike, 2004, p. 111). I loved the activities suggested in this section. Students ask their families to keep track of all the writing they do for a period of time. Then the students collect the data, categorize the data, and perhaps graph it. The students will be amazed at how much nonfiction people write in such a short period of time. This book also gives ideas for ways to help children categorize nonfiction by its purpose. This is valuable information, allowing students to see how and why nonfiction is embedded in our daily lives. One example is writing to persuade. There are 14 forms of writing listed that can help a writer persuade a reader, such as advertisements, editorials, cartoons, warning, applications, graffiti, and commercials.

Roser, N. L., & Martinez, M. G. (Eds.) (2005). *What a Character! Character Study as a Guide to Literary Meaning Making in Grades K-8*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. ISBN 0-87207-563-X; \$28.95.

BY KRISTINE ALLEN

What a book! A compilation of articles contributed by teachers, researchers, and authors, this book covers the distance between theory and practice. From Donald Graves's sequence, through which children come to understand characters and begin developing their own, to Maria Nikloajeva's Theory of Character in Children's Fiction, the reader learns not only the importance and purpose of character study, but how to motivate and engage his or her students in in-depth meaning making through character study.

What a character! is organized in five sections, each dealing with a specific issue relating to character study. Part I discusses the importance of character as a focus of study. Further, the authors discuss research that shows how, as students mature, their understanding of character matures also. Understanding this process enables teachers to better guide students through character study.

Next, an entire chapter is dedicated to organizing nonfiction information. Graphic organizers are a valuable tool not only for writing but for reading, thinking, and learning. They use both visual images and words. This chapter describes organizers, explains their uses, and gives many examples of how they can be used. It also offers fun projects and activities to help children with the essential skill or organization.

My least favorite part of teaching is assessment. How do I determine a child's hard work and give appropriate feedback? This chapter helped me understand the importance of rubrics, retellings, interviews, and think alouds and how they can help teachers and students, providing information for student improvement throughout the entire learning process.

Making Nonfiction and Other Informational Texts Come Alive is a must for all teachers hoping to enhance students' approach to informational texts. It is just as important in the early elementary years as in high school. This book holds great value among my collection of professional texts and will be referred to often for many years to come.

(Terrianne Harnden teaches first grade in Swartz Creek, Michigan.)

Part II consists of contributions by children's literature authors. They discuss the ways in which they give life to their characters and how they reveal their characters' feelings, thoughts, and mannerisms. These chapters offer teachers methods of helping students gain insights from characters introduced in their reading, as well as offering guidance in the development of characters in their own writing.

Part III contains chapters based on teacher research and written by classroom teachers. These successful teachers suggest activities that will extend even the youngest student's understanding of character. Suggested activities include reflective writing, role-playing, Readers Theatre, and various methods of visual representation.

Part IV presents "The Best of Character-Rich Books" appropriate for students in grades K-8. The authors

have given particular thought to artistry and appeal. They examine specific books and discuss the way characters are revealed through details. Included in this section are examples of student talk about books, and appropriate types of questions to ask to elicit meaningful responses.

Summing it all up in Part V, Maria Nikolajeva presents her research aimed at "developing a theory of character interpretation in children's literature." She gives the reader a glimpse of character development in children's literature across time.

Marinez and Roser state that "understanding the complexities of a character ... may lie at the very heart of literary meaning making" (p. 206). However, according to the authors, there are three other necessities: (1) good stories; (2) receptive students; and (3) insightful teachers (p. 207). After reading *What a character!* the reader will know how to choose good

stories and how to engage students in these stories and will have a repertoire of new ideas for instruction.

What a Character! demonstrates the benefit of character study as "a pathway to deeper literary understanding" (p. vii). It is through this deeper understanding that literature, in the words of Dr. Ronald Cramer, humanizes. Literature opens doors to understanding of self and of other cultures. It offers insights into problem-solving and coping with stressful situations. Through literature, students come to identify and empathize with characters in similar situations. Their hearts and minds are opened to the feelings and trials shared by all humanity.

This book is an absolute must for all teachers of English and the language arts!

(Kristine Allen teaches in the Department of Reading and Language Arts at Oakland University.)