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Editor's Message

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Editor's Message

NANCY PATTERSON, LAJM EDITOR

This fall thousands of people converged on Grand Rapids for Art Prize, the world's largest art competition. With a grand prize of \$200,000, the competition draws more than a thousand artists from all over the world. Many hope to win the prize money, but others simply want to display their art. It is the public who decides who gets the big prize through a public balloting process. Almost half a million votes were cast during Art prize 2012.

For some Art Prize is a wild west show that panders to mediocre art. For others it is a unique cultural phenomenon that challenges participants to ponder and debate the very nature of art. Everyone agrees that Art Prize generates a fascinating energy.

Art engages us.

It was American author and painter Henry Miller who said "Art teaches nothing but the significance of life." Often in our utilitarian quest to survey American Literature, teach *Romeo and Juliet*, or provide children with a prescribed number of grammar skills that could appear on a state test, we forget that the goal of the language arts isn't to master a set of skills but to participate in the world. Jerome Harste points out that most English language arts programs inadvertently make students more dependent on language as a primary means of communication rather than encouraging other sign systems, many of which are found in the arts. But if the goal of the English language arts is to expand students' abilities to communicate so that they can experience the world more fully, then we must recognize the role art plays in students' ways of knowing.

Philosopher Susanne Langer, in her 1948 book *Philosophy in a New Key*, points out that "... the purely communicative aspect of language has been exaggerated. It is best to admit that language is primarily a vocal actualization of the tendency to see reality symbolically" (p. 99). It is these attempts at symbolic reality that draws thousands of people to Art Prize. And it is by engaging students in representing

symbolic realities that they can explore the multiple ways of knowing in the English language arts classroom. This issue invites readers to consider the myriad ways that the arts not only provide pathways into meaning but push us to examine our own assumptions about literacy, learning, and schooling.

We begin with Fran Claggett, a nationally recognized teacher and winner of NCTE's James Britton Award. Her book *Drawing Your Own Conclusions: Graphic Strategies for Reading, Writing, and Thinking* has been a cornerstone in many English teachers' classrooms. Her article "Virtual Poems and Sun-Shadow Mandelas: How Art Can Improve Reading and Writing" draws from the best of that book. In it she shows teachers how they can invite students to create metaphors through drawing and then in their writing.

But Claggett's article isn't the only one that focuses on drawing. Allison Carey's article "Transmediation and the Transparent Eye-ball: Approaching Literacy Through Different Ways of Knowing" using Emerson's concept of the transparent eye-ball, describes how she challenges students to deepen their experiences with literary text through video production, collage, and sound mixing. Drawing on Eric Eisner's work that focuses on the arts and education, Bridgette Knudson shows us how she challenges her students to creatively represent themes in *Oedipus the King*. She describes a collage project that includes personal reflection and written critique and demonstrates her own critical approach to the standards-based curriculum she is required to teach.

Robert Jordan and Michael DiCicco also draw on Eisner's work in their argument for including the arts in education. They highlight research that shows increases in both verbal and math scores. But they warn us that the arts should not be included only because they can bring up test scores. They argue that "there are many other benefits to visual art integration..." and that education needs to include the arts because they deepen our understanding of what it means to live in the world.

In their article about integrating the arts into writing, literature, and science, Michael Letts and Kia Jane Richmond share an elementary grades project that challenges students to learn more about insects through the use of the visual arts. The project asks children to represent their scientific knowledge through both images and written language.

A number of our authors focused on music. Dale Schriemer, a professor of vocal music, and Nancy Patterson, a literacy studies professor who teaches a graduate level writing pedagogy course and takes voice lessons from Dale, share their insights into the art of teaching. Schriemer writes about his development as a singer and some of the unfortunate feedback he got as a student. Patterson discusses her own growth as a writer and how that growth often happened in spite of what she learned in school, not because of it.

Both Greg Shafer and Jason Griffith share how they encourage students to explore poetry through songwriting. Griffith challenges students to examine the poetry of song lyrics and shows how songs become a platform for literary discussion. Shafer uses songs as cultural artifacts and asks students to engage “in a judicious and sophisticated examination of not only music but history, culture, and language.” It is through lessons like this that Shafer practices a “pedagogy of empowerment.”

Iliana Cortez Santiago also uses songs to help bridge Latino parents’ understandings of the world to their own and their children’s emerging literacies. In her article “Connecting with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners through Music,” she explores the themes that arose as she worked with parents, and how she used music to help linguistically diverse students connect to the language arts.

In their article, “Not Standardization: Orchestrating Aesthetic Educational Experiences,” Christy Moroye and Bruce Uhrmacher outline a process through which teachers can more intentionally integrate the arts into their classrooms. They provide a framework that can guide teachers through this process.

We close this issue with an essay by Matthew Brennan, “Of Standardized Knowability.” In it he argues that our attempts to standardize curriculum are diminishing the role that impressions, sensations, and perceptions play in learning about ourselves and the world we live in. He lyrically shows how “art is method” and how it “makes accessible what would otherwise remain not only beyond our grasp, but beyond our imagination.”