Statement

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What We've Learned from the Pandemic

COVER ART: ELLA SALLI, ARVADA WEST HS

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A Letter from the CLAS President

ALEX THIEME

Alex Thieme is a Language Arts teacher at Littleton High School. CLAS has been her home since her days as a pre-service teacher at Metropolitan University of Denver where she first joined the university's student affiliate group for NCTE. CLAS has and continues to be a source of strength and community for her, and she is honored to serve as president this year.

November 10, 2021

Fellow Language Arts Educators,

I write this letter during a time of both burden and hope. We know this time of year can feel very long; the excitement of a new school year has dulled, and the respite of winter break feels too far away. However, this typical feeling we get during November seems to have an even sharper edge to it this year. Reeling from a pandemic that is still not behind us, teachers are trudging along through emotional and mental quicksand. I have yet to talk to a teacher this year who doesn't feel immensely and utterly drained right now. There is some comforting commiseration in that, but much more so, there is great sadness in that.

And yet.

I see hope flicker. A co-worker popped her head into my classroom before school today and said, "I just wanted to say hi, because, well I wanted to." I think about how lucky I am to have her as a co-worker, how lucky her students are to have her, for her energy and deep belief that they can do and achieve even more than they think they can. Another co-worker has spoken of seeing a therapist, noting that it is beyond time that she found

support for her own mental wellness. I have a fifth-year senior who came back this year because, as he said, “It’s time to do this,” and he has written more for me this semester than I’ve ever seen from him before.

This year is certainly not normal. But we teachers are resilient, and those of us who teach English know that “hope is a thing with feathers.” My friends, I hope you count those flickers of hope in this sea of hardship.

Let me end with a welcome. Welcome, and for some, welcome back, to the Colorado Language Arts Society. We are your professional state affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English. And, as your Executive Board Members and fellow Language Arts teachers, we are here for you. We hope our regular newsletter, *Currents* will be of use to you. We also continue to produce our bi-annual professional journal, *Statement*. May the articles within this journal strengthen and reinvigorate your practice. And finally, we hope you will drop by our new website, www.clasco.org, for more information and to renew your membership. In the sea of hardship, CLAS looks forward to continuing to provide more flickers of hope.

CLAS President

Alex Thieme

Call for Manuscripts

SPRING 2022

Almost nightly on the news, we watch angry parents accusing districts of teaching "Critical Race Theory." Although the theory itself is taught almost nowhere in public schools, it has become a facile label for any "non-standard" texts or curricula that expand the American story beyond its Euro-centric narrative. Sadly, some teachers are beginning to question the literature they teach, fearful of continuing to share the many wonderful stories which reflect the diversity of American experience and that amplify voices calling for equity and inclusion. We can't self-censor ourselves. We can't keep our students from the beautiful literature that reflects the diversity, equity and inclusion that eludes too many of them.

In this issue we want to know how and why you teach certain pieces of literature. How do you consider diversity, equity and inclusion as you plan the literature you will teach to the very diverse population most of us see in our classrooms? Do you teach in a workshop approach where students have choice in the literature they read? If so, how do you set that up? If you choose whole class novels, how do you make your choices? How do you plan discussions and writing assignments to get your students thinking about diversity, equity, and inclusion? How do you handle differing perspectives? How do you make connections to real-life experiences and to what your students read online or in the newspaper or see on television? How do you respond to adminstrators or community members who are uncomfortable with your curriculum?

Student writing and teacher writing is always welcome for consideration.

Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be double spaced (including quotations and works cited) and no more than 10-12 pages. Send your manuscript as a Word document.
- Follow current MLA style
- Manuscripts should not have been published anywhere else.
- Number all pages.
- Please include a photo (.png or .jpg) and a short bio (in Word)
- *Statement* is refereed. Manuscripts are read by at least two reviewers.
- DEADLINE: February 25, 2022

Send manuscripts to : Karen Hartman (kj_hartman@comcast.net) Include a statement that the work has not been published and is not being submitted elsewhere.

Statement Information

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STATEMENT STAFF

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What We've Learned from the Pandemic

Coping with COVID and Mostly Thriving

CINDY NATH

Cindy Nath came to teaching after careers in Human Services, Community Action Programs, and Employment in Training. She was a substitute teacher for 7 years until the Front Range Writer's Group advised her to become a full-time teacher. After earning her Masters in Education with Licensure she began teaching in middle school and moved to high school. She has taught at the Bijou School in Colorado Springs School District 11 for the past 13 years. For 6 years, she has taught English classes at the Pikes Peak Community College on evenings and weekends.

COVID has been a blessing in disguise for education. I think of it as the event that caused teachers to look beyond the political requirements of the job and really see our students in their reality. The journey had some dark turns and numerous doubts, but I am hopeful and optimistic about transforming what happens in my classroom.

On March 11, 2020, we met as a staff and were first told that we needed to prepare to potentially teach from home. This meant an exponential learning growth of technical knowledge and application for teachers in my school. We thought we had lots of time. This illusion ended abruptly on March 13. Although events were being planned by administration, teachers were dealing with their school day. Staff had 15-minutes notice to leave the building and grab everything they would need for 2 weeks. Everyone was sent home at the end of the day with the expectation that school would begin the next week online. Teachers and students would not be allowed into the school as custodians deep cleaned the entire building.

For 15 months teachers at the high school level in my district used Schoology for assignments. Student use of Schoology was spotty and

inconsistent. We had no idea how unprepared we were or, worse, how little our students could navigate their way. I was optimistic that I could meet with students and keep their interest for that short period of time online. Little did we know that it would be 3 months before we could return to the building to retrieve materials.

In the next week, students disappeared. Twice daily staff meetings online were spent trying to track the decisions of administration and figure out for ourselves how to navigate the online environment. My time experimenting with the platform didn't make me an expert, but I found a way to get things posted.

Together as a staff, we decided to first make phone calls and contacts with each student. We didn't have their cell phone numbers. I began by calling parents and asking basic care questions. In an average day, I made 20 to 30 phone calls. How is your family? Is everyone healthy? What do you need? Families were not coping well with being isolated together. In response to their concerns, staff delivered toilet paper, masks and food to various families by dropping them on porches, by cars, and at front doors. Most of the families were prepared on these fronts. A few were hit hard by illness: the flu, strep, and some COVID. These were reported to the school nurse who followed up with health information and guidance.

A small group of teachers delivered necessary items and made phone calls to their families. We talked and communicated by email and built an informal support group. This is who we trusted and leaned into on the most discouraging days. Together we wanted to respond to family and student needs and build trust and a caring connection. Only after conversations of safety did I ask about the student or schoolwork progress. Safety, empathy, and letting families know, most importantly, our concern was for their welfare.

In the first month, I asked for student phone numbers, which were added to the demographic database. As soon as these phone numbers were available, I began to call students. The first question was always, "Is everyone in the family healthy?" As more students expressed and showed signs of lethargy, I began to ask how they were staying in touch with friends. Most were not doing anything. I asked them to try reaching out to a friend by phone or email that week and checked up with them when I called again. These were still the early days of the pandemic and fear was rampant.

I shared my life experience with students about past incidents that had thrown society for a spin. I spoke to them about other events that humanity had survived and my trust that we would do so again. This was met with disbelief. I realized, for these students, it was the first time they had experienced any major national catastrophe. They had not been born on 9/11/2001. There was no similar cultural memory except from the adults they knew. Would they trust us?

Flexibility became critical. Deadlines were the first to go. Progression became difficult, as students showed up online one day and didn't return for 2 or 3 days. Many students tried to work "independently" with poor results. The reasons were varied. "I have to help my younger siblings in their classes because my mom is working from home." "We have one computer and 4 kids. I don't have access until after school." "We don't have internet unless my mom uses the hot-spot on her phone. She's working at her office today." This led to conversations together as a staff and advocacy for students with administrative staff.

As time stretched beyond 2 weeks, it became essential to minimize and simplify everything. What was the core skill that could be learned in this environment? What could students under duress practice and repeat for learning that would sustain their skills or grow them? Assignments were shortened and repeated more frequently. I listened carefully to my students' daily experiences and tried to build their reflection skills on these experiences. How did they cope with their new responsibilities? What did they need to complete assignments? Many expressed that they couldn't get online during a class time schedule. For some this was a choice, but many were doing their best to assist the family.

Some students began working full time to help support their family due to parental job loss. The experience of working full time to pay the family rent began with exhilaration and quickly drifted into unmanageable exhaustion. Supportive phone calls and WebEx meetings were focused on helping them make sense of changes they encountered.

Someone along the way pushed the theory that students turned off their cameras due to shame of their living situation. I had only one student who draped a sheet to disguise her situation. What they missed the most was interaction with their peers. Contradicting prevalent thought, I asked students to turn on their cameras to verify their presence. Many were barely out of bed and wanted to hide their behavior more than the living situation. At first, they were reluctant and concerned about their appearance.

Several books have inspired me during this time. These have guided my thinking and looking for new ways to implement instruction and relationships with students.

Why Motivating People Doesn't Work...and What Does: The New Science of Leading, Energizing, and Engaging by Susan Fowler

This book has challenged me to work on several main skills in the classroom to connect students to their intrinsic motivations. One is by building autonomy through respecting student's choice and encouraging the control of the self for students. The ability to have some control in any situation assists and grows a sense of well-being, which is critical in the pandemic. The second is relatedness which connects students to others and the greater good for family, friends, and society. The last is building a sense of competence by showing students their learning path and shining a light for the next few steps of skill building, allowing them a chance to solve problems and celebrate the steps of their growing skills and accomplishments.

Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes by Alfie Kohn

This book highlighted for me the ways in which rewards disincentivize human choices and activities. This happens because people sense when someone is manipulating the psyche and reasoning. This discourages a sense of self-worth on many levels. Kohn makes the case for natural curiosity and education's propensity for one-size-fits-all solutions that diminish the individual and cultivate mediocre achievement.

Solutions and other Problems by Allie Brosh

A comedic-tragic look at the inner thoughts and concerns of a young person faced with problems and discovering their inner hero. Learning that achievement comes even when you are not perfect or a stellar performer is an important lesson for both teachers and students.

Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell

Gladwell presents a realistic look at the "advantages" of successful figures and aims to denounce the individual myth of solitude success. Especially poignant are chapters 3 and 4 that look at "Genius" and calls this a legend that obscures how problems and difficulties develop character traits, skills, and stamina in a supportive group building from one generation to the next. His data is surprising and revealing. Students need support for their dreams and to hear communications of confidence that they can achieve them.

When they saw other teens, a reluctant openness almost appeared. I implemented breakout rooms with a simple task and allowed them time to interact before I "joined" different rooms. Often when I joined, I began to hear laughter and chatting—always with cameras on. I heard them reaching out to one another and positively encouraging one another. These healthy signs showed me it was filling a need in the students. More students began to show up to the daily class sessions. Soon they would join class asking if we were using breakout rooms today. I accommodated frequently, sometimes spontaneously finding a skill practice for the assignment. They needed this limited social interaction with their peers.

Using breakout rooms, I was able to meet individually with students and talk about their progress, concerns, and assignments. Very little of this time was spent on assignments. They needed connection. Assignments slowly followed and learning began.

Summer hopes were dashed as the COVID response continued its impact on society in the fall. Remote learning was not working for many high school students. Technology limitations and family obligations were core reasons. Work was done over the summer at district and school levels to alleviate concerns about equipment, internet access, and learning to use the software.

Classes began remotely with a class schedule in the fall; students were hoping the remote beginning would soon be over. I spent lots of time teaching the basics of the computer and Schoology to students. Many issues were solved by sharing screens and coaching students to maneuver the various platforms.

To improve motivation, I gave limited choice. I focused on a skill and let them choose topics or texts. Students would read one model reviewed as a class. They could choose from a small selection of articles that they analyzed. Topics to write about were discussed. Focus was on the skills they were to show me they had learned. My goal was reading and writing every day. No matter whether 3 sentences or a paragraph, or a page or 5 pages of reading, adjustments were made for individual situations.

There were some students who hadn't showed up for school or WebEx meetings. I continued to reach out once a week to the student and parents, always first asking about the family's concerns and gradually moving the conversation to student progress and assignments. Accepting every reason and encouraging them to think about life after the pandemic, I also asked about their graduation goals. One example

was a student who hadn't shown up to classes in 7 months. We talked every week. When cohorts opened, he tried coming to school a few times. He gave up and stopped coming. Mom called the office about a need to validate enrollment. In my next phone call with the student, I encouraged full participation in class. Within a week the student was in class.

I have read about all the "lost" learning. I disagree with this assessment. During COVID, students have learned about health issues, family crisis, and social isolation and how to deal with these concerns. They have watched adults confounded and wondered whether the world was ending. Social issues long discussed have reached waves of protest for equity. They saw how adults react and watched with thoughtful observation. Students see what happens when everyone works together or what happens when people work in opposition to each other. These are life-long lessons that will shape who they are as citizens, what their expectations of themselves and others will be, and their resolve to overcome challenges. These lessons are critically important to their future. They are more important than standards and have more impact on their families and society.

I want my voice to be in contact with families and students frequently. Not because I have all the answers but to be a voice in the cacophony of compassion, concern, and hope. I talk to students about resilience, their future beyond COVID, and help them dream and imagine what their future will be. The future belongs to those who do the best they can in the moment. History has shown us that when crisis hits, those who rise to the top try many new things. They find resolve to find ways to meet present needs, and they retain a hope for the future. Young people won't develop this skill unless they see it in action. I want to be this action.

Lessons Learned in a Time of Change: A Heuristic to Aid Reflection

STEPHEN WILHOIT

Stephen Wilhoit is a Professor of English at the University of Dayton where he also serves as Associate Director of the Ryan C. Harris Learning Teaching Center. He teaches undergraduate and graduate literature, composition, and creative writing courses and oversees faculty development programs related to faculty and staff personal and professional development. Steve has authored three textbooks (Pearson) and numerous articles on a range of topics, including rhetoric and composition theory, creative writing pedagogy, TA training, faculty development, and vocational discernment.

The series of COVID-related challenges we faced at our university likely mirror your experiences. Early in the 2020 spring term, we closed our campus and sent our students home, requiring instructors to teach online the rest of the semester. The following fall term, almost all of the courses at the school were delivered online until after mid-term when students were allowed to move back to campus and teachers could hold face-to-face classes following strict social distancing and health guidelines. All instruction was again delivered online for the first two weeks of the 2021 spring term, but after that, teachers could choose whether they wanted to finish the semester holding class online, face-to-face with the same restrictions as in the fall, or in some blended combination of the two.

When the campus closed in spring, 2020, we entered a period of great experimentation as many of us—including me—had to teach online for the first time. When planning and delivering our classes these past few terms, we've needed to consider both course content and pedagogy: given the students we were working with and the context for the course (online, face-to-face, or blended), what changes in course content and pedagogy would best facilitate student learning? Like every other teacher at my institution, I struggled as I learned how to teach courses in

multiple, changing modalities: online, blended, and face-to-face with social distancing and mask requirements in place.

Now that many pandemic-related restrictions at my institution are being lifted, like my colleagues I've entered a period of reflection. What did the pandemic teach me as an instructor? What did I learn about myself and my students? Despite all of the challenges, what about my teaching remained unchanged? What new course materials and pedagogies, often developed out of necessity during the pandemic, proved effective enough for me to embrace and build on in the future?

I've had the opportunity to think about and talk through this question in multiple contexts lately, with my colleagues in the English Department and with faculty and staff from across the university in our school's learning teaching center where I serve as associate director. As a result of these conversations, I developed a heuristic designed to help us reflect on how the pandemic impacted what and how we teach and identify changes we'd like to incorporate into our future teaching. I present the heuristic below and illustrate its use with lessons I learned while teaching the capstone course for English majors at my institution spring term, 2021.

A Heuristic for Reflecting on Change

Every time we teach a class we've previously taught, we need to consider how to improve our instruction and our students' learning by changing what we teach and how we teach it. In terms of both course content and pedagogy, the alterations we make can be anywhere on a spectrum from no change at all to a complete overhaul of our approach (see figure 1). From one semester to the next, we can leave the material we teach pretty much intact, totally change it, or

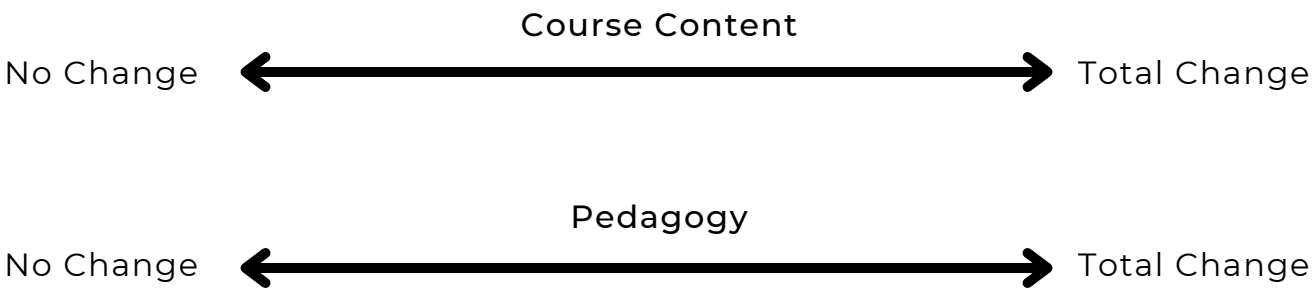

figure 1

perhaps change some things and leave others as they were. The same holds true for how we teach the course: our pedagogy can remain unchanged from the last time we taught the class, be totally new, or reflect some mixture of old and new.

Overlapping these two spectrums results in four quadrants capturing four possible scopes of change in course content and pedagogy from one semester to the next (see figure 2):

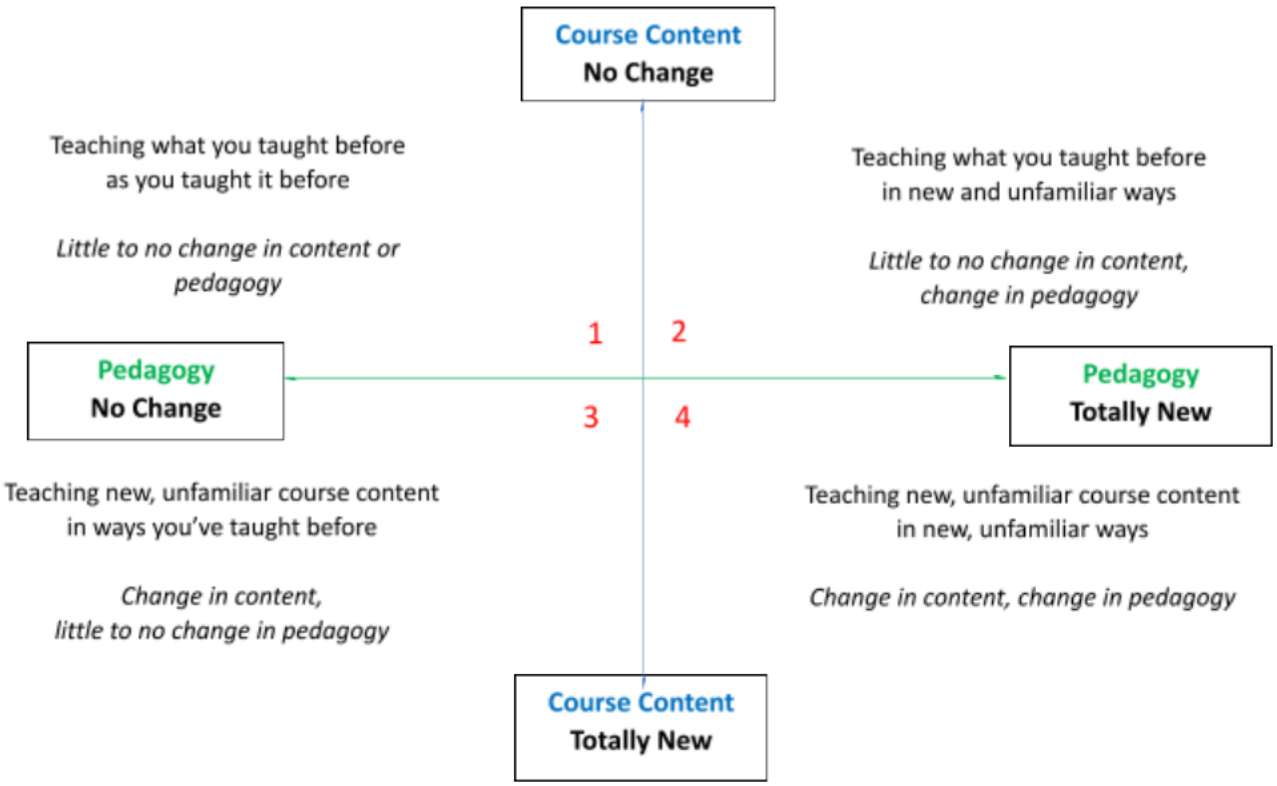

figure 2

Quadrant 1: Instructors make no change in course content or pedagogy when they teach a class from one term to the next

Quadrant 2: Instructors make little to no change in course content but do change the pedagogies they employ

Quadrant 3: Instructors teach new, unfamiliar course content with little to no change in pedagogy

Quadrant 4: Instructors teach new, unfamiliar course content employing new, unfamiliar pedagogies

Changes in content or pedagogy can be global (involving the entire course) or atomistic (involving only parts of the course). Any given semester, instructors may teach a class much as they taught it in the past, making only minor changes, if any, to course content and pedagogy. Other times teachers may decide or, as with the pandemic, be forced to fundamentally transform what they teach in the course and how they teach it.

Examining our teaching carefully from the perspective of each quadrant has helped me and my colleagues identify the key changes we made to the courses we taught as a result of the pandemic and to determine which alterations in content or pedagogy we'd like to incorporate into our teaching in the future. After briefly explaining the perspective each quadrant offers, I share a few of the insights I gained when using the heuristic to reflect on the capstone course I taught for the English majors at my university spring term, 2021. The university required all faculty to teach the first two weeks of the semester completely online as the students moved back to campus. After two weeks, faculty could continue to teach online, utilize a blended format, or return to the classroom observing strict face mask, hygiene, and social distancing requirements. For the capstone course, I chose the third option.

Quadrant 1: In terms of course content and pedagogy, what did not change?

As you reflect on the ways the pandemic impacted your teaching in any particular class, start by considering what did not change. Even if your modality of teaching changed, for example, moving from in-class to online teaching for all or part of a semester, in terms of the course content and pedagogy, what stayed constant? Undoubtedly, the pandemic had a profound impact on education, but even during these times of uncertainty, change, and rapid accommodation, what aspects of your teaching remained relatively unimpacted?

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, I found that I left substantial aspects of the capstone course largely unchanged from the previous times I'd taught it. For example, the basic course structure—the topics we covered and the order in which we addressed them—remained the same. Previous end-of-term course evaluations had shown students valued both. I did change a few of the course readings, as I do most

semesters, but most remained the same. Of the four major course projects in the class, three remained the same. As detailed below, though, I made a substantial change to the fourth. In terms of pedagogy, I continued to employ a conversation-based pedagogy with lots of discussion, though it was more challenging to implement with everyone having to wear masks in class. In the past, I'd posted course material such as the syllabus and assignments online using our university's course management system (CMS). That did not change, but as I explain later, I did find myself making more extensive use of the CMS in other ways.

As I completed this heuristic exercise, I was a little surprised at how much of the course and my teaching remained unchanged. During the semester, it seemed like everything was is flux. An important lesson for me was this: when feeling overwhelmed by change, we need to pause and focus on aspects of our teaching that have remained stable and successful over time. That consistency can boost our confidence and provide a sense of comfort and continuity.

Quadrant 2: Pedagogically, what changed in how I delivered familiar course material?

Next, consider how you changed the way you taught the material you covered when you taught the class before. During the pandemic, you may not have changed the readings or assignments or exams you've previously employed in the course but found that you had to teach them in new ways. What were the changes in pedagogy you employed for that class? Even if the changes were forced on you by circumstance, in the end did you find any of them more successful than the approaches to teaching you used in the past? Are any of these changes in pedagogy worth pursuing and fine-tuning in the future?

I found that the requirement to teach the capstone course online during the first two weeks of the spring term required real changes in pedagogy. Class sessions occurred on Zoom, as did my office hours. Once we began to meet face-to-face, to adhere to social distancing requirements, I kept my office hours online for the semester. This is the first change I will retain in the future. Previously, I had not held online office hours but my students and I both found them helpful, so in the future I will retain that practice. I doubt I would have experimented with online office hours had COVID restrictions not forced the change on me.

To help students, especially those who at certain points in the semester may not have been able to attend class in person (some were quarantined by the university for a length of time if they tested positive for COVID or had close contact with someone who did), I posted much more material than usual to the CMS. These materials included links to videos we watched in class, course handouts, and reminders of due dates for graded projects. I don't know why I never posted this material on the CMS prior to COVID, but I plan to continue doing so in the future. This past year has taught me the benefits of making greater use of the features our CMS offers.

Incorporating more online elements into the course also prompted me to change how the students completed one of the major course projects. The class focuses largely on questions of vocation and calling. During this, the last semester of my students' college experience, I ask them to reflect on and write about what their vocations or life callings may be, how they can use their gifts and skills to help others in ways that bring joy to their lives, and how their experiences as English majors helped define who they are. The second major project in the course is a vocation autobiography. I ask the students to look back on their lives and trace the evolution of their current callings. For example, growing up, how did they envision their future, what did they want to be when they grew up, who and what influenced their plans and dreams, what key turning points did they encounter in their lives? In the past, students wrote up and turned in this assignment. Though in my own mind I'd always conceived of this project as a kind of oral history, I never structured the assignment that way. This past spring I did—instead of writing up the assignment, the students produced an audio recording of it and turned it in. This change in pedagogy made the assignment come alive for me and my students in ways it had not in the past. The pandemic didn't necessitate this change, but the spirit of experimentation the pandemic engendered in my teaching encouraged me to take this step I'd been contemplating. I will definitely incorporate the change in how I teach future capstone courses.

Finally, though it did not impact my teaching, in conversation I found that many teachers had to change the way they evaluated student learning in a course. Giving their usual tests and examinations online rather than face-to-face proved impractical or impossible to do securely, so they switched to alternatives methods of evaluation, such as requiring

students to write an essay or complete a project instead. They will need to decide whether to embrace these new evaluation practices in the future.

Quadrant 3: What new course content did I create without fundamentally changing how I teach?

Now, reflect on the changes you made to course content during the pandemic while keeping your pedagogy fundamentally unchanged. For many teachers, course content is impacted by context: what we cover is influenced by important events occurring on campus and in the wider culture. For example, if you were teaching in 2001, how did 9-11 impact what you covered in class? Do you change course readings or assignments during a presidential election year? Even if you did not make significant changes to your pedagogy as a result of the pandemic, how did it impact course content, and are any of those changes worth pursuing further in the future?

As I stated earlier, last spring I didn't change the content of the capstone course much as a result of the pandemic. However, I felt I had to give my students an opportunity to reflect on how the pandemic was impacting their lives and education. I thought it was especially important to provide my students an opportunity to talk and write about this topic, especially given the focus of the capstone course. These students can never know what a non-pandemic college experience would have been like, but they clearly valued the opportunity to discuss how the pandemic had impacted their lives and education, the lessons they'd learned, and the impact they felt it was having on their future lives. I created several ungraded writing exercises on the topic and many students discussed it in their graded projects, as well. It also came up often in conversations before class sessions started and during class discussions.

When talking with colleagues, I've found that the most common change in course content during the pandemic involved altering the number or readings or assignments included on the syllabus or changing evaluation/testing practices. Many instructors found that their students were having a difficult time keeping up with course requirements when they taught the class online: it was taking longer for the instructors to teach assignments and longer for students to complete them. As a result, many cut the number of major projects or course readings in the class

and gave students more time to complete them. As they employed this heuristic to reflect on their teaching, they had to consider whether these changes in course content were worth retaining when the pandemic ended.

Quadrant 4: What changes did I make that involved changes in both course content and pedagogy?

When my university sent all students home midway through the 2020 spring term and told faculty they would teach their classes online for rest of the semester (and possibly longer), like many of my colleagues I was dismayed. Like them, I envisioned all of the changes I would have to make to my teaching would fall into this quadrant, that I would have to overhaul all of my course content and teach everything in fundamentally new ways. For most of the faculty I talk with, this concern proved unfounded—we were able to teach successfully during the pandemic by making more limited changes in course content and pedagogy. However, every instructor I talk to can identify at least some aspect of their teaching that fell into this quadrant: to be successful during the pandemic, at some point in a class, they had to change both what they taught and how they taught it.

The most fundamental changes I made to the capstone course that touched on both content and pedagogy involved the course videos I created. Prior to COVID, I had never made an instructional video for a class, but over the months of the pandemic as I listened to my colleagues explain how they used videos in their courses, I saw the value in trying them myself. I created all of the videos using Zoom and posted them on the CMS.

First, since the first two weeks of the semester classes were held online, I decided to create a short video in which I explained the structure and goals for the course, what I expected from the students, and what they could expect from me. I plan on creating similar videos for other courses I teach. During the semester, I created videos that offered just-in-time support for student projects. I knew that the pandemic was seriously impacting many of my students' time management skills. My sense was that more students than usual were pressed to complete their work on time. For each graded assignment, I recorded a brief video that students could watch when they were ready to draft and/or revise their

projects. In these videos, I reviewed the purpose and goals for each project, repeated advice and instruction I'd offered in class, remind them of project-related resources already posted on the CMS, and shared tips on how to complete the project successfully. I also shared mistakes students had made in the past when working on the project—and how to avoid them—as well as pointers on what previous students had done to create highly successful projects. The students greatly appreciated this kind of support, and I plan on employing similar videos in every class I teach from now on.

Another major change in both content and pedagogy involved flipped classroom instructional techniques. Since all of the course readings were posted on the CMS, I started asking students to complete reflective exercises based on the texts prior to each class session instead of having them do that work during class. Doing the work prior to class left much more time for class discussions. In the future, I will continue to employ flipped classroom teaching techniques this way.

Conclusion

Like all teachers, I learned a lot over the last year and a half. As a result of pandemic-related challenges, I gained a greater appreciation for my students' flexibility, adaptability, creativity, and resilience. I became more willing to experiment with my teaching and gained confidence in my own ability to adapt to changing circumstances. I also better understand both the promise and limitations of online learning. The heuristic I developed helped me reflect on what changed in my teaching during the pandemic and what remained constant and to identify changes I made in course content and pedagogy that are likely to be long lasting. I hope it can serve you the same way.

The Multiple Uses of Pop Music to Underscore SEL and Literacy Learning for Remote and Hybrid Teaching grades 5-12

ROSE REISSMAN

Dr. Rose Reissman is the 2020 Iste Literacy Spotlight Best Practices Winner and the recipient of the Pennsylvania Council for Social Studies Award 2021. She is the founder of the Writing Institute at DITMAS IS 62, Brooklyn.

While the use of “unrelated to curriculum singing” has always been an accepted staple of elementary education, few content teachers grades 5-12 advocate using it even minimally during a lesson. Yet, how often does a secondary teacher arrive in a classroom or log in to an online session to be met by students with glazed eyes, present in the sense of being online or onsite, but otherwise disconnected?

As a veteran ELA teacher, I have seen this more often than I want to count. Recently, since March 2020, the disconnection has been accompanied by literally downcast eyes and a sad set of student faces. Does one just push steadfastly into the content?

Why not take less than five minutes for a bit of pop music to warm up your literacy audiences for their content objectives?

1. Song start-up to energize and set positive self-awareness.

Since I love listening to music on the radio, online and as exercise background, it immediately occurred to me that students could be revved up for literacy content learning by a signature high energy musical start of under three minutes. So I started a session April 2020 with the rousing Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock"—circa 1955—link. During the under 2:30 recording, every student came visually alive. I added another minute for an improvised dance session. Then we went back to our content lesson with real smiles on some faces- even if they were caused by most of us dancing away in a very amateur fun fashion. At the end of the lesson, I asked students to brainstorm questions (one naïve one was "Was the world black and white like the video in the 1950s?") about the 1950s based on the video and pointed out to them that they could click the lyric link at the site or research Bill and his group.

Although the research was extra credit, most of them did it the next day plus were surprised at other data about 1950's recording technology, clothing, dance styles and other facts. They brought in additional resources they found like History Channel and Rock and Roll definitions. Not only had this energizing music opening "woken" them up, but it actually engaged them in digital informational research and connected them to contemporary 20th century American culture. Music starts are infinite given digital free resources accessible to any teacher and can be limited by the teacher to under two minutes. Try YouTube Music for a broad spectrum of songs. Teachers and students can also click to the lyrics as well. link. The positive energy and social interaction through dance or listening is so needed given today's climate. Engagement in research is a literacy bonus.

2. Signature Theme Music

Who says that only television shows or movies can have signature theme songs? Why not a secondary school class as well- particularly one that is hybrid or remote? This idea was actually shared with me by some educators in a hybrid professional development I did in October 2020. During our debriefing a month later, these teachers told me that as a team they used Queen's "We Are The Champions" chorus to start their classes—social studies, mathematics, and science. link.

Of course, a class could also be challenged to select theme music to be played at the start of each subject session. This would involve research the students can use to support their choice.The class would obviously involve research and details supporting how the music connected to the subject content. Student selected lesson start themes can be changed every month.

3. Deliberate Use of Positive Lyrics persuading or supporting vulnerable students during times of global anxiety.

Last year as students began clamoring and hoping for a return to school to end their year, I spent an entire class period on a song unfamiliar to my students—"High Hopes" sung by Frank Sinatra to a child, replete with his exquisite rhyming and enunciation. The lyrics allowed me to teach analogy, rhyming, and possible themes or lessons found in songs. The short and accessible song shored all of us up in the remote classroom—myself included. It was SEL optimism and goal setting combined with attention to craft found in lyrics.

4. Song Lyrics as a template for updating in these challenging 21st century times.

I remembered as a child from my visits to amusement parks, the Louis Armstrong song—"What a Wonderful World"—link which was originally recorded in 1967. Its lyrics seem in opposition to the world outside my students' world, so I suggested they look outside their windows and write or take photographs of something which seems beautiful and hopeful to them.

Their photographs of flowers and trees on the streets and sunsets were poignant and sweetly rendered. Their statements, which explained why they chose to photograph these images, were testaments of hope inspired by the arrival of spring. I also found out some of the students had heard this song on the animated movie—*Finding Dory*.

These four separate strategies are only the cusp of a student-engaging portal to integrating pop music for grades 5-12 in a minimal under three minutes time-frame or an expanded version into content

format. The use of music can put the light back into our students' eyes, eyes dulled by recent events. It can inspire students to metaphorically and literally "dance" forward in their learning plus explicate music's connection to their emotions, positivism, and our society.

How about it?

Why not get your students rocking to the music and finding what's wonderful in our world during these challenging times?

Additional Pop Music Resources and Ideas:

Songfacts.com
A great site with the history behind the song and its connection to political and social events,
You can find potential song connections to all content plus develop prompts to focus student listening and research or in style updates.

Bonus Fun
For Halloween and Frankenstein—Mary Shelly Readers—plus chiller stories or updating of monster stories. Before showing students, explain and show Boris Karloff as Frankenstein and share the song facts about this song.
"Monster Mash" by Bobby "Boris" Pickett & the Crypt –Kickers
link

Schools Shouldn't Entirely Disregard Changes Introduced During the Pandemic

Despite the countless difficulties experienced during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school system shouldn't attempt to forget valuable experiences

ARIZONA LEE, SKYLAR WHALEN, MASON MCLELLAN, NATALIE YODER, ANA SOFIA VALDEZ, & DJ GALLEGOS

Arizona is a junior at Mead High School. She has been on the newspaper staff for three years, and this is her first as Editor-in-Chief of *The Mav*. Arizona enjoys reading murder mystery novels, listening to music, and spending time with friends and family. Arizona plans on studying political science and journalism when she goes to college

Skylar has been a content editor for one year and member of the newspaper staff for two years. She has been in choir since she was ten years old and plays club softball. In her spare time, she likes to paint. Skylar also has a passion for science, particularly physics. She wants to pursue a career in Wildlife Veterinary Sciences.

Mason is a content editor for the student newspaper, and this is his first year on staff. Mason plays the drums and has been in jazz band, pep band, marching band, and orchestra. Mason is also the head of the school student book club. Mason will attend CSU Ft Collins next year where he will study medical science

Natalie has been a part of the staff for one year, and this is her first as content editor. Natalie is unsure about what she wants to pursue in college, but she is interested in studying chemistry. Natalie is also passionate about the environment. She has been competing in dance since she was in 3rd grade. She also enjoys painting and skiing at Loveland Ski Area.

Ana Sofia has been the copy & design editor for *The Mav* for one year. She enjoys going to church, hanging out with friends, and watching Quentin Tarantino movies. Ana Sofia is interested in becoming an entrepreneur after college.

DJ Gallegos is the newspaper's head photographer and content editor. DJ has been a part of the newspaper for two years. He fell in love with the paper when he realized he could author his own baking column and experiment with photography. DJ enjoys hiking, playing video games, and baking in his spare time. DJ wants to attend culinary school after he graduates high school.

Our overall quality of life within schools could improve if we consider some of the new practices introduced during the pandemic.

For nearly the entirety of last year and a good part of the year before, the school community found itself learning online—some vowed to never involve themselves with this again. It would be insensitive to ignore the fact that many struggled with isolation and lack of motivation while in school during the pandemic.

Though these challenges may tempt us to ignore the daily routines that were altered to create a safer, healthier environment, it is incredibly important to acknowledge that there were plenty of changes that we could genuinely benefit from in schools across the nation.

COVID-19 offers lessons about everything from the value of human connection to health and safety in public spaces. To disregard entirely the struggles that students faced in 2020 is to refuse to apply lessons that could improve our general quality of life within the school system.

Many have been eager to jump back into everyday “normalities” taken away during the societal panic that arose during the pandemic. Truly, no one can be blamed for this eagerness; what was lost throughout was the willingness to consider that our pre-pandemic school experiences needed change.

There were problems before the COVID-19 shutdown that we didn’t have solutions for. If we’re willing to change, the pandemic can offer new ways of life that are different but aren’t entirely bad.

Online schooling, for example, opened a platform for some students to find and use their voice for the first time. For them, virtual classes were an environment of comfort and support as they didn't have to deal with whispering in the classroom or judging looks from peers during class discussions. They were also given the freedom to allocate time for personal needs. There are many examples of students thriving in digital spaces.

We understand that online schooling did not work well for all, including several of us; however, it did offer a solution for some students and their families to feel safe.

Additionally, asynchronous Fridays offered a stable A/B day schedule for students and dedicated time for questions and clarification.

There were students who disliked this set up as it caused exhaustion for them. For others, it aided in learning better time management. The caveat, however, is that the asynchronous Fridays often left A days robbed whenever there were long weekends.

Moreover, class periods were used purposefully to make sure students understood lesson content. In many classes teachers spoke for less than 30 minutes and then provided time for students to work at their own pace.

In addition, new sanitation protocols are now in place that promote student health. As a result of better air filtration, masking when sick, and cleaning desks between classes, many of us did not even catch a cold last year, let alone COVID-19.

If we are open to growth, the pandemic could lead us in the direction of normalizing what needs to be normalized: washing our hands, having the freedom to work independently, and being given opportunities to direct our own learning.

As a school community, there were areas that improved during the pandemic. We were united through our general gratitude for the human connection we were forced to give up.

Why are we encouraging regressing back to where we were before the major lockdown of 2020? Why are we refusing to learn, grow, and consider some of the benefits gained from going through such a trying period of time?

If we ignore the past in an attempt to hide from the hardships we faced, we will never recognize the everyday things that need to change.

Teacher Writing

Last summer, after a particularly difficult school year, some teachers wrote – not about the past school year that had so many wondering about their career choice - but to remember the power of writing. They also knew their time spent writing would make them better teachers of writing.

There is so much research that tells us that teachers of writing must be writers themselves. As far back as 1994, Donald Graves in his book, *A Fresh Look at Writing*, wrote "Writing with your students is probably the single most powerful thing you will do to help them learn to write." Penny Kittle echoes his beliefs about writing with our students when she writes, "I now believe you really can't teach writing well unless you write yourself. . . The apprenticeship with a master in the field is still the best model for learning." (*Write Beside Them*, 2008)

How can teachers help their students become better writers if they haven't dealt with the messiness of writing? Is it enough to say your beginning needs to grab your reader's attention? Probably not. But, if you can explain your own thinking about how you struggled over finding just the right beginning to a piece of your writing, and, if you share those multiple drafts as you tried to get it just right, students will begin to understand the craft of drawing their readers into their writing.

We hope you find inspiration for your own writing as you read the teacher writing we are sharing with you in this issue. We also hope you send some of your own writing our way for our next issue.

Unearthed Again

SIERRA GILBERTSON

Sierra Gilbertson teaches English at Fosston High School in Fosston, Minnesota. In addition to teaching, she currently serves as past president and executive secretary of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English. Sierra holds a Master's Degree of Literacy Education from Hamline University, where she studied the impact of critical literacy methods on the moral reasoning of adolescents. Arts integration and thinking routines are other areas of interest that have made a significant impact on Sierra and her students.

After decades,
Kamloops Indian Residential School
Appears in the news.

215 children were
Abused in life:
Taken from their homes,
Stripped of their names,
Beaten into submission -
A violent assimilation.

215 children were
Abused in death:
Forbidden their rites,
Concealed in their land,
Ignored by Canada and the Vatican -
An unacknowledged genocide.

215 families are
Still uncertain,
Forever traumatized,
Denied truth,
Denied justice,
Denied healing.

215 is the tip of the iceberg.
How many more were neglected, murdered, and hidden?
How many more survived with scars
seen and unseen?

Seek the truth.
Speak the truth.

Note to Readers: Within three weeks of writing "Unearthed Again," 751 graves were discovered at the Marieval Indian Residential School and 182 at St. Eugene's Mission School.

Student Body

CURT HEIMBUCK

Curt Heimbuck is in his 14th year teaching 4th and 5th grade students in Mapleton Public Schools. He seeks out the small classroom moments that reveal his students' big ideas about the world. And as he learns more and more each day, he realizes how little he knows. His favorite Steely Dan album is *The Royal Scam*.

Having a body isn't much fun.

I saw one of my former students at the swimming pool the other day. This kid is smart, stubborn, tough, and charming. That meant he was sometimes a nightmare to have in class.

But we teachers are hopeful. That's what waking up to a new start 170 times a year does for you. We spot the smallest spark and spend time, energy, and tears trying to nurture it into a roaring blaze. And no matter how many times that spark gets snuffed out by poor attitude, bad choices, or the trauma of their lives, we always remember the spark and keep trying to kindle it into the flame.

The charming, confident kid I saw at the swimming pool was always sparking. So, I loved him despite the fact that he often made parts of my days miserable.

But the kid at the swimming pool is also a little big—the size of a boy who might rather wear a swim shirt in the pool. So, when he peeled off his t-shirt to get into the pool, he held his arms crossed tightly across his breasts, trying to cover them from any other eyes. And he walked the entire way to the edge of the pool holding those arms tightly across his breasts, and he kept his arms squeezed across his chest while he jumped into the cool, refreshing water. And this tough kid, who prided himself on never showing weakness, was laid low, made human. It was one of the first dents I'd ever seen in his armor.

Every year my Latina students stuff their arms inside their desks. They're embarrassed by the dark, noticeable hair. Our dress code used to outlaw hoodies, so the only way they could hide their arms was by sticking them inside their desks. And I, oblivious, would write on their report cards, "Needs to participate more in class." Or "Needs to raise her hand and ask for help."

Middle schoolers drape themselves in dark hoodies on the hottest days of August. Teachers try and try to get them to adhere to the rules. But the shame they feel from exposing their bodies to peers is so much worse than any punishment a teacher could contrive. So, they keep it covered up.

Every year when the photographers come for class pictures, they ask us to line our students up from tallest to shortest. I always ask the kids to do it on their own first, but it's not too long before I have to step in and intervene. Most kids know where they stack up and head to the front or the back, but some just don't have a very good sense of themselves.

And every year there is a fight. Usually, it's between two of the shorter boys, fighting at the end of the line over who is taller--a thing they have no control over. So, I intervene, have them stand heel-to-heel and make an executive decision. All the while the girls at the front of the line look down on them--literally, if not figuratively.

Having a body isn't always much fun.

Bodies are always gendered and racialized. So, while we use clothing to cover up our weird, lumpy, and uncomfortable bodies, we also use clothing to accentuate the gender and race of those bodies. And learning to do that takes a lifetime. And there are lots of teachers and lots of conflicting lessons to learn.

I was always taught to use my white, male body to dominate other bodies. I wasn't taught this explicitly. No one ever sat me down and said, "This is how you should use your body to get power for yourself." But, I was taught to knock people over on the football field. I was taught to hold girls tight against me on the dance floor. I was taught to "defend" myself at the first hint of danger.

And, honestly, I was really bad at it. I never got into fights. I wasn't much of a football player. Coaches and fans would scream from the sidelines, "Get your head in there!" And I'd stand back from the scrum and think, *Naw, I'm fine.*

There were some countervailing forces to the dominant body

theorem. Church tries to teach us that our bodies are wild things that need to be disciplined. When I was confirmed, the pastor sat us in the front pew of the church and told us not to drink, not to do drugs, and not to have premarital sex. I followed her exhortations pretty well, despite all my efforts not to. My fellow confirmands didn't always do as well.

Having a body can also be kind of fun! But when you're convinced that your sober, virgin body is not having as much fun as other bodies, it also isn't much fun.

When I was in high school I could sweat through anything—t-shirts of course, but also button-down shirts over undershirts, sweatshirts, and even suit jackets. I'd buy prescription-strength antiperspirant but that somehow seemed to make it worse. I learned to wear undershirts and dark colors. One day I really wanted to wear my new blue beautiful Guayabera shirt, but by second period chemistry, I had big wet circles under each arm. One of my good friends even asked if I was alright. I never wore my beautiful blue Guayabera shirt again.

Our bodies betray us and make us miserable, but they also teach us something valuable: empathy. Though I sometimes wish I could shed my body, though I often wish I were just a brain in a jar, by shrugging at the sleeves and tugging at the seams of my own misfitting body, I can empathize with others who walk around in misfit bodies of their own.

And empathy—the core of human connection—is the foundation for good teaching.

Celestial Gravity

SHAWN COBB

Though born in Denver, I was raised in New England. My wife and I returned to Denver in 2001. I have been teaching in the Cherry Creek School District for twenty years, fifteen of which have been at Cherokee Trail High School. I teach Reading and Writing Lab along with PIB English 10 and Theory of Knowledge. After my twentieth year of teaching and having a beat up teacher's heart, I took the Colorado Writing Project with the intention of healing. The course did heal me and has become a cornerstone for all my classes this year. I am writing with my students and find the workshop model to be revitalizing. This course saved me.

My cousin Kathleen is my youngest living cousin, and I am going to lose her this year...maybe next year, truth told, far too soon. Cosmically, geologically, our existence is ephemeral, but to each of us, once tethered to one another, time slows, memory gains depth and momentum, and life feels marathon long. I love my cousin, her approach to this life, her gravitational pull on those for whom she shines. I am going to miss her light, her warmth... miss it already... know that in my lifetime it will not really fade even in her physical absence. Therein lies the rub for me. I lost my mother to dementia seven to ten years ago, spiritually; lost her biologically six years ago, but this is what love is for me. The acute joy of connection and the engine of my purpose, but also the grief of loss and its permeation across the void. What becomes most apparent is that I do not truly love too many people. I do not mean that in some flippant, offhanded or selfish way. Love demands. You, we, must all be willing to give into those demands if we truly love. Sometimes, maybe more often than we wish to admit, we do not give our own permission for that commitment. It just happens, and that is how we know it's truly love. This acute connection is the type of relationship I had with my mom; I am still connected to her across time and space, and I feel her in Kathleen.

They are cut of the same fabric in temperament and gravity...like witches or hippies that travel through the temporal plane of reality and seem unfazed or untouched by the mania that touches us all.

I remember Kathleen moving to Colorado... We talked about it like we had both come home. I was born here, and my father always told me to grow where you're planted. This advice, both cliche and literal, took me a while to figure out. Colorado promotes outdoor living, healthy lifestyle, and, like most places, connections with family and friends. For Kathleen it had the seeds of family and friends and became her home. She, like all her siblings, are transient. None live near each other... none live near their parents... and that set me to wondering about the bonds of family, the tethering to our past and our blood. Family is a choice as all decisions are choices. We carry the past to a degree in our present, not always as a gift, but often wrapped and hidden from our view. In "looking in the box" we are better able to discern who we have become. Place is such an integral part of that process, as we all come from somewhere, and that geography has gravitational significance as well. This is not to say that some of us do not break free of our initial orbits, comets whose elliptical paths bring us home again and again. Is home not place but always people? Do we not think of home as geography when it is actually anthropology? I feel the pull of home not toward place but always toward my wife and children, my sister and father, my few friends, my family. I have felt the gravitational pull toward Kathleen and my aunt and uncle, felt them pull me toward them.

I remember her almost getting married but somehow sensed that she should not. Hindsight is baloney but foresight and intuition are not. Like her condition was some supernova in front of her, it sent gravitational waves that she seemed to intuit long before it upended her. Building a relationship with your own mortality is a decades long process that healthy people endure... travel toward slowly. I have been doing that for the past twenty years. My mortality is primary data for my reality. It consistently informs my decision-making in the present. I think about Kathleen and how at 34 she would just have been sowing the seeds of that relationship, but her mortality turned around long before she had considered that and was hurtling toward her. The information did not correspond or cohere with the reality she was consciously living. How could it? It made every decision, none of which I would ever feign to judge, so difficult for her. All I can say is that she shouldn't have changed

any of the choices she made, not one. It was always her life, and she embraced the rapid and certain close of it with love and travel and family and friends and so much damn class and moxie. Color me amazed yet again. I am reminded by the light of her that how you live your life becomes your life.

I remember her sitting at our table, laughing and saying Cindy and I were life mentors for her. The memory of that feels nice. Cindy and I just try to live the best life possible, to be real and consistent and honest. By saying this, it brought Kathleen closer, made me more aware of and protective of her. When you have a mentee, that sort of chooses you and you lose her, saying it sucks is litotic. I have this innate pragmatism about life and biology and reality. I love Robert Frost's poetry for its austere and unflinching look at life. In his poem "Out, Out" he is so dark and brutally honest, but it is one thing to agree with a message from a distance. Yet, when the knife cuts close to home, we flinch, we bawl and curse the universe.

Writing this is part and parcel of my flinching. Kathleen created in me a sense of purpose and protection, and she also created a generational bridge to my children. She thought I was mentoring her, but, in many ways, she provided insight and gave me space to navigate the raising of two daughters in the early 21st century. So, sitting at my table, the acuity of her compliment runs both ways; at the time, I did not know it, have not said it, but our daughters are captured by her light, by her gravity.

I remember standing in Brian Kenny's kitchen, drinking a beer and telling her, under what circumstances or from what question I cannot remember, that my singular, irrational fear was contracting Lou Gehrig's disease, ALS… told her this in our shared cousins' kitchen, our oldest cousin, who not three years earlier had lost his youngest daughter in a rafting accident on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon. Life provides and life removes. It is factual. Timing and desire do not seem to play into the mix. Two years later Kathleen was conformationally diagnosed with ALS. She asked me if I remembered saying that to her in Brian's kitchen. I did. I do. It is like a stone that I carry, a weight that holds me in the memory of her, will always be a memory I have of her and us, and I wish it wasn't. It was such a casual moment, so normal and free of additional gravity, and now it weighs on me in such weird and naggy little ways. We will never drink beers in that kitchen together again. This negative memory space is so unusual for me, so uncommon in how I have constructed my frameworks for living. I rarely get caught in my past, but

diving into this net on purpose, ensnaring my mind seems the best possible way to find open water again. Is that possible? Likely? Maybe… I remember driving to Salida with Brian's only son, Patrick, my cousin (I do not delineate first, second, third cousins… blood be blood and family be family) to pack Kathleen's belongings and bring her home to Denver, so Billy could come out and take her home to Plymouth, MA.

All her friends from Salida were there to help and already she was too weak to walk from the truck back to the house. She had to sit down a lot and catch her breath. A year earlier we had hiked around Salida. She was running, teaching yoga classes at a studio in downtown Salida for her own health and as a side hustle. Why is this condition so damn aggressive? Why her? Why not me? I say to my progeny that "your individual suffering, as my individual suffering, is insignificant." Though Bhuddistie (not a word, I know) it is pretty freaking accurate in regard to life mantras and truisms. But people like to rest in their cozy, antiquated thinking and often turn away from the truth. The truth is that we are born, we suffer (to varying extents) and we die. I just want to live for a very long time, and I want the same for those people, like Kathleen, who are family to me. I know that is naïve, and I am pretty pissed that I am going to lose her here before any of us are ready. The universe or whatever does not give a damn about what we want. It is just going to happen the way it happens, and I and everyone else should enjoy the time we get and the time we get together and worry less about the past and less about the future and say "I'm sorry" and "I love you" and "I forgive you," and we should live in the present which is the gift.

And I will always remember to remember. That's what I am doing here for you, Bill and Maureen. This moment exposed us all for who we are and want to be. I remember you, Billy, just coming to Colorado to take your baby home. I remember, Maureen, your loving, soothing maternal embrace of Kathleen, orbiting closer to your love and warmth. My memories, our memories of Kathleen, are going to be what keeps her alive and vibrant. I think most people miss the gravity of choosing, choosing to remember; memory is a long arc across the next several decades. The process of writing this was cathartic. The pictures, the memories, the geography and anthropology we share will hold us, gravitationally together. How fortunate I am to have been pulled in by Kathleen, to have been there with her along the path of her arc, to have had the opportunity to love and be loved by her. That, all that and more will ensure she lives for as long as I live but probably longer.

Frozen to the Face

excerpt

JACOB CLEMENTS

I was born in Des Moines, Iowa and grew up 40 miles to the east in Newton, Iowa. My parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and extended family are all great storytellers and that is how I began to tell my own stories. After graduation from the university of Northern Iowa, I moved to Colorado and worked for Colorado Connections Academy as an English teacher for 2 years. In 2015, I started a Master's degree program in East Asian Language and Culture at the University of Kansas, a program that I finished in 2019. I returned to Colorado and began teaching literacy at Aurora West College Preparatory Academy. I live in Aurora with my fiancé Talia and our dog Eire. When I am not teaching or writing, I watch a lot of sports, play a lot of golf, and try my best to get in other forms of exercise.

I look at the series of colored mock rock shapes crawling up the gray wall. The one directly in front of my face is green and has a white unlined index card hanging off of it, looking like the body tags in a morgue in *Law and Order*. This one has been labeled in a high school girl's bubbly handwriting: "Easy does it-Jess." A smiley face is to the right of "it" and a heart to the right of "Jess." Dozens of these labels mark different colored handholds, each with a symbol in the left corner, symbols modeled after those used in skiing. The one in front of me is a green circle. Beginner.

I follow the trail of green handholds as they meander up the wall, my neck tilting higher and higher until I reach the top out forty-five feet above me. There is a ten-foot difference between the top of the climbing wall and the ceiling made of the original steel beams and wood planking of this old Northland warehouse. Despite the climbing gym's youth and cleanliness, the steel beams are coated with dust, turning them a reddish gray. Heavy looking industrial lights and one huge skylight in the middle of the room provide more than enough light for the gym and its climbers

I take a deep, uneasy breath. This was all Wendy's doing. Next time Talia and I meet her and Willy for Maid-Rites at Taylor's back in Marshalltown,

she and I are going to have a long talk about exposing that little daredevil to extreme sports. Next, I'm going to be jumping out of an airplane or off a bridge. I take a breath, then I bend down and tighten my shoes. These god-damn things. I have long toes and they feel as if they are being folded back into the balls of my feet. I lift both feet off the ground one after another and try to get some feeling in my toes again, then I tug on the auto-belay system to ensure I am properly attached.

Another breath, a shaky one this time. Talia, saying words that were meant to comfort but are mostly lost in the sound of blood rushing to my ears, stands to my left. My hands are sweaty and clammy, but that isn't new. I wipe my hands on my shorts, then I reach behind me and into my chalk bag—one last reminder of the good, firm Earth that humans are not meant to leave—and then I begin to climb.

****

I wasn't always so fearful. When I was four my family—Dad, Mom, and my two younger sisters— drove from our home in Winterset, Iowa, to Mount Rushmore, a memory lost to my maturing brain and only kept alive by old photo albums and VCR tapes of our first family vacation. It was more than just our first family vacation; it was probably the first time we had driven further than the grocery store since my youngest sister's first birthday.

On this trip, we stayed in a hotel, a relative rarity for my outdoors-loving and firmly lower-middle-class family. Our hotel room overlooked a helipad, and when my family wasn't gazing at the defaced stolen Native American land, I was watching the helicopters endlessly taking off and landing. Over and over again. All-day.

Someone, likely my mom since, much like his only son, my dad's bravado ends when he gets further off the ground than he can jump, discovered that it was a heli-tour of Mt. Rushmore. Someone, likely my mom again since, like his only son, my dad's deepest and most primal fears can only be overcome by a woman in his life, decided that I should go on the tour since it would be free for a child under five with an accompanying adult. So, my dad and I put on flight helmets, myself enthusiastically and Dad with obvious trepidation, mom snapping photos the whole time, and then we boarded the dragonfly-esque helicopter.

My father has to take over the story from here since the camera stayed on the ground with Mom. He tells it like this.

"We could see for miles. Jake laughed the whole time. He got to radio the air traffic controller or another helicopter or something. It wasn't as bad as I thought."

He's full of shit.

I know he's full of shit. My dad is famous in family circles as a storyteller. His voice commands attention. Even his "inside" voice can be heard across the production floor of the mid-sized printing company he worked at for thirty-five years. In anger—well, you would think it had imbibed the voice of the God he so fervently worships. He knows the power of his voice and can modulate it like a pipe organ. He also has an artist's eye for detail, wardrobe notwithstanding.

So when my father tells a story he is being honest about—his salvation from the drugs and alcohol that threatened to consume his life, his days as a corn-fed middle school wrestler, or the lessons that he learned growing up on a series of rented farms in rural Jasper County—he uses all of his storytelling powers to grab his listener (never "reader," Dad's stories are told around-the-campfire-style, like the John Wayne protagonists that he admires) by the scruff of the neck and doesn't let go until you got the message.

For example, Dad once chaperoned an overnight fifth grade trip to Springbrook State Park, west of Des Moines on Highway 25 and about an hour and thirty-five minutes from the parking lot of Berg Elementary School in Newton, Iowa. That night, when a dozen laughing, shouting, and farting fifth graders wouldn't settle down for the night, Dad walked to our cabin door, shut off the lights, used his angry voice to order us to our bunks, and then used his storyteller's voice to share the time he accidentally trapped a badger in one of his raccoon traps. For fifteen minutes, he discussed the price of raccoon skins in the '70s, described the rise and fall of his dad's rented ground north of town, relayed his adolescent fear and awe of this beast in his trap, and spoke of his power over the creature's life or death. For fifteen minutes, from the time he recited this particular story to the moment he managed to free the badger from his trap, the only sound was his voice moving up and down his own personal scale with the rise and fall of the creek bank and speeding up or slowing down with the intensity of the moment. For fifteen minutes, not a spring, not a rustle, not even a long high squeal of a desperately held in gas attack could be heard. And after that, we were silent until breakfast.

Seven years later, one of these boys, a guy I didn't particularly like (and he didn't particularly like me either), a future all-state wrestler and all-around self-determined badass, reminded me of that field trip while drinking Nattys together at a party I wasn't welcome at.

"I still have nightmares about that fucking badger."

So for my dad to have just three short details and nothing else from a story like that….well, I don't believe that it "wasn't that bad" for a second. His fear of heights is second only to mine. Imagining him in a helicopter built for observation buzzing around a mountain and not silently cursing his wife for making him go up in this contraption doesn't fit with Mom's stories of their Iowa State Fair Midway dates, where mom would force him on the now discontinued double Ferris wheel. I cannot picture him stoically looking over the landscape below him when I have seen him, white-knuckled, clinching the seat of the Galleon ride at Adventureland.

No. It "wasn't that bad." It was terrifying.

As I was saying though, I wasn't always so nervous. Children don't know fear. At least not half-White children far south of town on a country road in a big two-story house with apple trees in the yard and no neighbors for a half-mile. My sisters and I were princesses and princes of our little kingdom. From the near bank of the ditch to the apple trees in the back. From 50 feet left of the house to the gravel driveway, we could go anywhere. To the garden, where I would eat tomatoes until my mouth turned red (never mind the big garden spiders spinning their webs between tomato plants). To the raspberry bushes, where I would eat raspberries until the bush was picked clean (ignore the bees, they ignore you). To the apple trees, where I could climb the lowest branches and pick as many as I wished and there were always more (that fall won't hurt you). When we went to town, whether we were visiting friends, going to preschool or my first month of kindergarten, or shopping at the grocery store, it was as if my family was visiting royalty. I talked with anyone, sang when I wanted, play fought when I needed to. I had no fear.

If only those days could last.

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The first few feet are easy. Green hand and footholds are evenly spaced and large. I look down after moving up a set of holds, and I'm about ten feet off the ground. No worries, I tell myself. If the worst happens and the auto-belay rope snaps and I fall from here, those mats will make it a bruising at worst. Just like the bouldering courses. I look back up, find the next handholds, and progress up another foot.

Matchstick Memories

LEAH CARMALT

Leah Carmalt is many things, but the most important titles in her life are mother, wife, daughter, teacher, and friend. As a mother of two young children, she spends much of her time participating in imaginative play, exploring the great outdoors, cooking, controlling some chaos, and relearning the beauty of the world through the eyes of her children. Most ideas for her writing come from her family. She is in her eighth year of teaching and is currently a fifth-grade teacher at Whittier International Elementary School in Boulder, CO.

My parents pulled into the driveway with the moving truck packed floor to ceiling with antique furniture, useful tools, dusty old photographs, and the sentimental pieces my mother could not stand to part with just yet. They had just driven 1,900 miles after taking on the emotional challenge of packing up my maternal grandparents' home. With the passing of Mummum and Poppop, the time had come to say goodbye to a house while clutching to the memories that made it a home.

Having just moved to our first home, my husband and I were inheriting many of Poppop's gardening tools and some of Mummum's furniture. Among the furniture being hauled from the truck and into our new house was a hope chest. I was taking the chest mostly because I knew it would put my mom's aching heart in a slightly happier place. The chest had been a gift from my grandfather to my grandmother for their wedding, and, while it was dated and drab, I figured it was worth holding on to for a bit.

The pinkish-cream exterior was yellowing after years of sitting at the end of my grandparents' guest room bed. The smooth linoleum texture had cracked along the sharp edges, the same edges that pierced unsuspecting shins if you weren't careful maneuvering through the crowded room. Now that it sat in my house, I realized there really was nothing decorative or exciting about the piece,

other than the story that came with it, but I figured I could use it as an excuse for a painting project, making it unique to my style and home. Of course, it was a nice reminder of Mummum and Poppop as well.

After placing the chest in my living room, I needed to figure out how to actually put it to use. As the hinges creaked open, I was embraced in Mother Earth's hug as the unmistakable red cedar scent escaped the wooden enclosure. This comforting feeling dissipated as soon as I noticed the two large gallon size bags sitting on the small shelf in the top of the chest. Each bag was bursting at the seams with enough matchboxes and matchbooks to light up that cedar hope chest with a swift flick of the wrist. The matches colorfully cluttered the empty chest, each imprinted with tiny letters, logos and phone numbers for restaurants, hotels and venues that meant nothing to me.

"Mom!" I knew she was trying to pull a fast one on me. My mother is about as sentimental as any sweet soul could possibly be, and her mother was a collector of everything. This made for a challenging combination as far as clutter and clean closets are concerned.

"What is it?" my mom sweetly asked as she entered the room. Behind her eyes I sensed a gentle smirk.

"What's with the gallon bags of matches?" I knew she could sense my annoyance. She knew how I felt about prolonged storage of things from yester-year. I had to convince her to throw out her 60-year-old Chatty Cathy that had been mute for the past 30 years and practically pried the unrecognizable E.T. doll from her hands to throw it in the trash. The original leathery skin that made it so realistic, and a bit odd, was peeling off the face and body making it creepier than it was at the start. When questioned about why it hadn't been tossed decades ago, my mother explained she just loved the memory of startling family members by placing it in random corners and closets around the house. She just really has trouble letting go of anything associated with a memory, even denture molds from the orthodontist. Yes. It's that bad.

"I had no idea those were even in there," she lied while batting her eyes, unable to conceal the smile despite biting the side of her cheek. She has always been a bad liar.

"Yeah... right. *Seriously*?! Who could possibly need this many matches? Why are you not keeping these instead of pushing them on me?" I protested.

"I don't want them," she admitted, "but you know I can't get rid of them. Do what you want with them, but I do not have it in me to throw those out."

When your mother is as close to a saint as anyone you know, and when life has thrown one too many curve balls at your parents in a short amount of time,

you take the matches without arguing. “Fine.” As I put them back in the hope chest, I muttered, “Good thing I like candles. I will never have to buy a lighter for the rest of my life.”

As we sat down to dinner, I lit a candle, giving my mom a hard time as I heaved the bag of matches from the chest. “I guess I better start lighting candles every night.” As I pulled out a box, a recognizable cursive swoop caught my eye - “Jeep ate here 1979.” I grabbed another box and flipped open the cover, “Sailed on this, April 15-22, 1995, to Bermuda” and again, “Ate here several times in February when Auntie and Uncle Clarence had an apartment at the beach.” Nearly every matchbox, regardless of size, was a treasured memory my grandmother wrote down. Instantly, I understood why my mother could not get rid of those matches.

Keeping records of our lives is a natural human instinct. We snap photographs to freeze time or to be reminded of individuals that have made their way into our story. We write in journals to record our joys, our curiosities, our ideas, and our frustrations. We tuck letters away in dusty shoeboxes, to either forget the pain they caused or with the anticipation of rereading them someday, so we can relive cherished moments, despite our inability to travel back in time. My grandmother chose to record her life on matchboxes - simple meals, outings with friends, vacations she took with my grandfather. While each matchbox was just a small moment in her everyday being, collected in those gallon sized bags, they captured countless memories that fueled the fire of her lifetime.

Do we do this for ourselves? Did my grandmother pull out her collection and hold these matches in her hand to relive these moments when she was still alive to do so? Or do we record these moments, on a matchbox or in journals or in photographs, so that we can be better understood after we are gone? I assume Mummum knew my mother would not part with them, so, as she was fighting the cancer that took her from us, did she think this would be a way for her memory to live on well beyond her years on Earth?

With 191 matchbooks left, I figure I will experience at least 2,000 moments when I will think of my grandparents and smile, catch a glimpse of part of their lives, and find myself in some of the matchstick memories. I am confident I will never truly understand why people choose to record their history in writing, or photos, or collections, or leave no record of their lives at all, but I am positively grateful for the little memories left behind that keep me connected to my family every time I light a match.

Young Adult Literature

YAL from Some of Our Favorite Librarians

We asked a few of our favorite librarians to share some Young Adult Literature they've been reading recently. We all know how motivating YAL can be to our students, especially those who aren't interested in reading anything at all. Which of these books will hook your unengaged readers?

Hollie Hawkins, Teacher Librarian—Eaglecrest HS, CCSD

Me (Moth) by Amber McBride
Interest Level: YA, Fiction
A lyrically crafted debut novel in verse weaving together themes of love, loss, personal growth, and the dreams we keep hidden. The story centers around Moth, a girl who is the only surviving member of a car crash that kills her brother and parents. Grieving the loss of her family, she moves from NYC to suburban Virginia with her aunt. She meets a Native American boy, Sani, who is dealing with his own tragedies, and together they decide to take a summer road trip in hopes of rekindling the passion for life they have both lost. The inclusion of Black Southern Hoodoo traditions and those of the Navajo/Diné people is artfully combined to highlight beliefs/origin stories while exploring the way trauma affects and shapes our lived experiences.

Blackout by Dhonielle Clayton, Tiffany D. Jackson, Nic Stone, Angie Thomas, Ashley Woodfolk, and Nicola Yoon
Interest Level: YA, Fiction
Six joyfully interlinked stories are brought to us by six best-selling Black female authors. Taking place over the course of one afternoon during a total power outage in New York City, our protagonists search for love, family, friendship, and air-conditioning! Each short story is full of humor, intersectional representations and the familiar concerns, hopes, and trials all people face. This quick read highlights how our shared human experiences are centered around community and the need to belong.

The Other Talk: A Reckoning with Our White Privilege by Brendan Kiely
Interest level: MG/YA, Nonfiction

Kiely, co-author with Jason Reynolds of the best-selling *All American Boys*, uses this book as an opportunity to help support white families in beginning dialogue on race and a version of "the talk" (a common discussion Black and Brown American families have with their children about race) with young people in their lives. By using a frank, conversational style with readers, he defines white privilege and structural racism in easy to grasp language helping white people recognize their own racial privilege, so they can begin to move into action against racism. He uses real experiences from his own life along with research data and examples to show how systemic racism creates opportunities for white people while limiting the opportunities for BIPOC. The book serves as a call to action against injustices we see within our US society and the global community.

Michelyne Gray, Teacher Librarian—Cherry Creek HS

White Smoke by Tiffany Jackson
Interest level: YA(HS), Fiction, Horror

After Marigold Anderson's expulsion from school for drug use, her mother gladly accepts a 3-year artist residency in a newly renovated (gentrified) Midwestern town of Cedarville. "Change is good. Change is necessary. Change is needed." This is the mantra Mari repeats to herself as she navigates her interracial, blended family's move from their small California beach town. However, despite the fresh appearance of their home, Mari's family is instructed to not go in the basement, construction workers refuse to stay past the afternoon, and items in the home soon begin to disappear. The plot is a bit scattered in its progression: Mari suffers from debilitating anxiety after a bedbug infestation when she was younger; previously she self-medicated with weed but has been unable to secure any in Cedarville (and subsequently is myopic in her pursuit of it). Additionally, there are subplots around class, race, drug laws, and gentrification. However, Tiffany Jackson delivers on the suspense and horror in this modern haunted house thriller, if only to have it end abruptly and with several unresolved storylines.

Grown by Tiffany Jackson
Interest level: YA(HS), Fiction, Mystery/Suspense
Enchanted Jones, an aspiring singer, captures the attention of famous musician, Korey Fields, at a music competition. She is quickly seduced by Korey's stardom, money, and power. However, behind Korey's stardom is a man grooming a young teenage girl. Soon, Enchanted finds herself cut off from her family, imprisoned by Korey, and often drugged and helpless. The book opens with a crime scene. Readers know that Korey is dead but are unsure about Enchanted's involvement. Through a series of flashbacks, readers will be eager to piece together the clues about who is responsible for his death. For music lovers, a Spotify playlist is available for all songs referenced in the novel. Despite the author's claim that this novel is not about R. Kelly, it is difficult not to be reminded of his case while reading *Grown*. Jackson includes a content warning for references to sexual abuse, rape, kidnapping, and opioid addiction at the beginning of the novel..

Current titles that are hard to keep on the shelf: *One of Us is Lying* by Karen McManus, *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera, *Punching the Air* by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam

Currently reading: *Better, not Bitter: Living on Purpose in the Pursuit of Racial Justice* by Yusef Salaam of the Exonerated Five

Tiffany Stephens, Teacher Librarian—Legacy HS, Adams 12 Five Star

Tokyo Ever After by Emiko Jean
Interest level: rom-Com readers and any lover of all things Japanese.
California girl Izumi “Zoom, Zoom” Tanaka’s world is turned upside down when she inadvertently discovers that her father is none other than the Crown Prince of Japan. Izumi’s foray into Japanese royal life is predictably a disaster, but her wit and authenticity charm even the most serious of royal handlers. Funny and Engaging! Why I loved this book: Perfect narrative voice and lots of fascinating details about life in Japan.

Indivisible by Daniel Aleman
Interest level: readers of social issues who enjoy Realistic Fiction such as *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin*.
Mateo Garcia has always known his parents were undocumented immigrants, but the threat of deportation seemed a distant issue, taking back seat to his love of theater and work at his family's bodega, but, when ICE appears at the family's apartment door, Mateo must navigate the most trying events of his life. Mateo's devotion to his little sister, his heartbreaking decisions about school and theater, and his relentless devotion to reunite his family make for an emotional and heart-felt journey. Why I loved this book: Realistic portrayal of a timely topic with a strong protagonist.

They Went Left by Monica Hesse
Interest level: readers of Historical Fiction, especially *Between Shades of Gray* and *The Book Thief*.
A Holocaust story that is unique for its portryal of what happened to the survivors immediately after the liberation of the concentration camps. Zofia Lederman is liberated from the Gross-Rosen concentration camp in the spring of 1945. Returning home, she finds her family was not so lucky. Zofia has reason to believe that her brother may still be alive, though, and so goes on a quest to reunite with the only family she has remaining. Why I loved this book- Enlightening story about a period of time that we don't discuss often, the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.

Fireborne by Rosario Munda
Interest level: fantasy readers who like political intrigue will like *Red Queen*
After a revolution takes down the monarchy, the elite job of Dragon Riders is opened for children from all backgrounds. Annie and Lee are some of the lucky ones who are picked to train to be the riders of the new republic's dragon fleet. Competition heats up as they fight to be the First Rider, the commander of the fleet. Meanwhile a monarchy in exile threatens the very existence of the new republic. Why I loved it: The politics made the story feel like historical fiction, but the added fantasy element gave it a fun twist!

The Last Word

Keep the Lights On

MATTHEW GUSTAFSON

Matthew Gustafson teaches at Cherry Creek High School. He has been teaching English for 17 years and is a Lab Host for the Public Education Business Coalition. Prior to working in schools, he was a magazine editor until he received a Boettcher fellowship to pursue his teaching career through the Boettcher Teacher's Residency and the PEBC. He still enjoys taking professional development courses through the PEBC, the Colorado Writing Project, and the AP/College Board. Outside of school, he is a father with two little boys at home, ages 9 and 11, and their pet, a mini sheepadoodle named Beatrice.

I have to admit that I am a bit of a Luddite as a teacher. I don't think there is much we need to teach English beyond some books, some paper, something to write with, and some time together.

So, of course, I was challenged by teaching online. The constant posting of videos and links, finding new apps and resources to help students, and even the time with kids online, was awful. I felt like my days were filled with all the worst parts of my job. It was just me sitting alone in my cavernous classroom shouting at a couple of screens, hoping someone was listening. Sometimes my room would be so lonesome that the motion sensor would turn the lights off on me.

While I learned quite a bit about using technology last year--like the importance of having a second screen during a Zoom lesson, and where to put a ring light so I don't look like death--what I want to bring back to the classroom this year isn't an app or a program or a digital practice.

I learned very quickly teaching online that no matter how engaging the Ted Talk or Zoom lecture or other piece of content I post online, there is no substitute for the social interaction we have with our students and that our students have with each other.

Learning is inherently social, and we just survived a year in which our kids have been separated by fear and sickness and technology and trauma, so the most important thing I'm bringing back with me into the classroom is knowing how important it is to give kids opportunities to work together to build their understanding.

When last year felt the worst, when I was overwhelmed with all the posting and emails and plagiarism, when I was exhausted by all the Google slides presentations and lecturing to black boxes, I returned to what was most comfortable to me: using the workshop model to get kids talking to each other.

I'd start with a quick mini-lesson to set our purpose and then transition into getting kids working together in breakout rooms using Google docs. Then I'd pop between groups and add my thinking to their documents, and our days felt a little better. Even if we were sitting alone in our respective rooms, at least we were communicating with each other. Teaching felt less exhausting and more productive.

Now, despite an urge to try to have them sit still and listen while I tell them about all the things I think we need to catch up on, and there are things we need to catch up on, I have to trust what I know to be true about school: learning is inherently social and students' engagement in their own education is more important than what I know about my content area.

When I came back to the classroom last spring, I ordered new furniture and got rid of the old sled desks that kept kids in such neat rows. Now kids sit in table groups of four or in bar-height tables. They move around a lot. They work with their peers every day. They talk to each other about their thinking about last night's reading. They talk to each other through their ideas before writing. They talk to each other to come up with questions about tonight's reading. They talk to each other about their rough drafts. My classroom is loud and filled with kids talking to each other. The motion sensor doesn't go off on us.

I use the workshop model to facilitate their learning and interactions with one another because part of coming back to the classroom is coming back together.